

LEAVE THE GUNS. TAKE THE BAKLAVA ...

DOING CRIME

a Kat Makris
Greek Mafia novel



ALEX A.
KING

Doing Crime

A Kat Makris Novel

Copyright © 2015 by Alex A. King

All rights reserved. This book or any portion thereof may not be reproduced or used in any manner whatsoever without the express written permission of the publisher except for the use of brief quotations in a book review.

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, businesses, places, events and incidents are either the products of the author's imagination or used in a fictitious manner. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, or actual events is purely coincidental.

Created with Vellum



For my sister, who is all the good adjectives and none of the bad ones

Contents

Chapter 1
Chapter 2
Chapter 3
Chapter 4
Chapter 5
Chapter 6
Chapter 7
Chapter 8
Chapter 9
Chapter 10
Chapter 11
Chapter 12
Chapter 13
Chapter 14
Chapter 15
Chapter 16
Chapter 17
Chapter 18
Chapter 19
Chapter 20

Also by Alex A. King

Chapter 1

THE YEAR I turned ten I watched Dad punch a hole in the bathroom wall with a hammer. It looked like fun. I really wanted a turn with that hammer. Dad being Dad, he hogged the hammer and tossed me one of his stories about Baboulas, the Greek boogeyman. Baboulas, he said, dug holes in the earth to hide treasure. Nowhere else was safe enough.

My eyes widened; I forgot about the hammer. "What kind of treasure?"

"What kind of treasure do you think a monster keeps, eh?"

"A collection of frozen heads?"

He tipped back his head and laughed. "What kind of treasure is a frozen head?"

"Not very good treasure," I admitted. In my defense, stories about Baboulas usually followed a dark bloody road, so I wasn't exactly stabbing in the dark with an icepick.

"You are close. Gold and jewels were not the only thing Baboulas kept underground. People were also valuable, especially if they were the family of enemies or they kept a vault filled with special knowledge in their heads." He quit hammering for a moment to tap a finger on his temple. "Baboulas would hide them underground until it was time to extract the information."

"How?"

"How what?"

"How did Baboulas extract the information?"

He held up the hammer. "Sometimes with a hammer. Sometimes with drugs. But most of the time, all Baboulas would have to do is appear and they would talk." He swung at the wall again.

"Does Mom know you're knocking down the wall?"

"I know." Her voice floated down the hall. The rest of her was in the kitchen making granola bars. She was going through one of those phases where she was determined to overhaul our already mostly-healthy diet and replace ten percent more healthy with twenty percent less flavor.

"Don't worry," Dad said, "we already had that fight."

Down in the kitchen, Mom laughed.

"Why are you smashing the wall?"

"Not the whole wall, just this part of it. I'm putting in a safe."

"A safe? Like rich people have?"

He laughed. "Yes, like a safe for rich people, but smaller, for not-so rich people." He winked at me before taking another swing. "If a thief stops to look in the medicine cabinet," he said, "what he wants is drugs. He won't pull the medicine cabinet off the wall, searching for a safe."

"What if it's a girl thief?"

"A girl thief is even better. She will be too busy cleaning the bathroom to find the safe."

Oinking noises emanated from behind us. Mom had abandoned the granola bars for the fun of watching Dad swing a hammer.

"You know I'm joking," he said.

"No," she said lightly, "you're not."

I was more interested in Dad's project than their banter. "Why do we need a safe?"

"To keep things safe," Dad said.

"Like what?"

We had birth certificates, mortgage papers, insurance policies, and the other usual middle-ish class assortment of flammable burdens that were a pain in the butt to replace if the worst-case scenario happened. But some of those lived in a safety deposit box at the bank, and the rest were tucked away in a fireproof box under my parents' bed. What did we need a safe for?

He set aside the hammer, balancing it carefully on the bath's ceramic ledge, and crouched in front of me. "Secrets, Katerina."

"What kind of secrets?"

"Dangerous ones," he said mysteriously. He waggled his eyebrows.

Mom scoffed. "Some cash for emergencies and my good jewelry."

I eyed them, wary. "In case of the zombie apocalypse?"

"Zombie apocalypse?" Dad muttered. "Where does she get these things?"

Mom and I looked at each other. "You're the one who tells her horror stories," she said.

"Are you hiding things from Baboulas?" I wanted to know.

Dad picked up the safe, set it in the wall. "Nobody has secrets from Baboulas. Not for long."

I couldn't kick off my boots. Every time I tried to sneak my heel out the jerk next to me said, "Baboulas will know if you take off your shoes. You want people on this plane to think you are poor? I don't think so."

Until a few weeks ago, Baboulas was the monster featured in all of Dad's bedtime stories. Then after Dad went missing—presumed

kidnapped, on account of how dodgy-looking dudes escorted him out of our Portland home—I'd discovered Greece's Boogeyman was my paternal grandmother.

We'd been in the air for too many hours. I was slowly devolving into a psychotic rage beast. The sensation of impending doom was beginning to make my muscles suffer from periodic weak spells—when they weren't twitching from bottled-up stress. I wanted to stomp up and down the aisle, waving my arms, smashing champagne glasses, slapping the cutesy sleep masks off the sleeping passengers' faces. But mostly, I wanted to seize my neighbor's ankles and heave him out the Emergency Exit, for the crime of being an annoying shitweasel.

"We're in first class. No one thinks I'm poor." I pushed the words out through a tense jaw and gritted teeth.

First class was Grandma's idea of a compromise. So was the bonehead clogging up the seat beside me. His name was Takis and he was my cousin's cousin's cousin. He had the personality of a mosquito and the physique of a sock puppet. To top it off, he'd dressed for the trip in a slightly oversized gray pinstripe suit with a criminal sheen. Not me—I'd shot for comfort. Boots, favorite broken-in jeans, fitted T-shirt with a hoodie thrown over the top, once the airplane began blasting frigid air. The absence of humidity had soothed my long, dark, mildly frizzy hair to sleep.

I had insisted on taking a commercial flight back to the states, shunning Grandma's offer to have Takis fly me home in her private jet so I could 'take care of business'. It wasn't until I arrived at Athens International and checked in that I realized anything was afoot. My seat had been magically upgraded to first class, and there was some sort of fast-talking concierge who whisked me away to a VIP area to wait with people who looked like they could afford to pay first class prices. I couldn't. My bank account was topped up with money I'd borrowed from Dad's safe—money that may or may not have been dirty.

This week, some German tourists had passed counterfeit euros in Makria's meat market, and I'd taken the information and gone digging. Word on the street—and by street I meant Internet (more specifically a message board called The Crooked Noses) was that my uncle in Germany—a man I'd never met, nor knew existed until three weeks ago—had an unhealthy interest in printing his own fortune. He'd apparently sent one of his men to the Naples area, where counterfeiting was an artistic skill passed from father to son to the occasional affluent criminal. And it just so happened that inside Dad's safe was an Italian passport with Dad's face and some other sucker's name that said he'd been in Italy not long ago, when he was supposed to be hauling bubble wrap and packing peanuts across state lines. My

whole life Dad had been a truck driver for Winkler's Packing Goods ... or so I thought.

I needed another look inside that safe in my parents' bathroom. That's why I was trapped in a comfortable seat, watching champagne and high-end snacks roll past.

Grandma had kept Takis a secret until I was flipping through the inflight magazine, wondering if I could swap my ticket for a permanent vacation to the Maldives' white beaches. I was debating changing my name, going native. Takis had swung into the adjoining seat, slapped his pancake butt down, and turned his oily grin in my direction.

That was several hellish hours ago.

Now Takis said, "Look at that poor girl with that dashing and generous man, they will say. He must have taken pity on the homeless."

"Keep it up, I'll tell Marika."

Marika was his wife and my—sometimes—sidekick. She had a heart of blown sugar and a body like a comfortable sofa. She was also sitting several rows back in coach. Takis had been so busy trying to outsmart me on Grandma's command that I'd managed to outmaneuver him without realizing it.

"You do that ... after we land and you can turn on your phone." Takis settled his head back on the headrest, closed his eyes. "After we land in another country, while she is at home with our children. Where she belongs."

I jabbed him with my elbow. "Move."

"What for?"

"Bathroom."

He tucked his legs under his seat so I could shimmy out. First class was nice, but basically it was a larger sardine can. I smiled at the flight attendant, pushed through the dark blue curtain dividing haves and haves-but-less-of-it, worked my way back to where Marika was blasting her neighbors with chatter. She'd dressed for comfort, too, in a chartreuse warm-up suit that make her rustle like a paper bag every time she twitched a muscle. The couple next to her were red-skinned and pink-eyed. I wasn't sure they even spoke Greek; with their freshly burned skin and their dazed stares I guessed not. After we filed off the plane they'd probably run to the nearest travel site and whip up a review about how the airline trapped them onboard with a crazy Greek woman.

"I'm here to rescue you," I told them in English.

"It's okay," the woman said. "We don't mind." Her gaze screamed, HELP US.

I crouched beside the big Greek woman. "Takis is being Takis. You

want to go up there?”

Marika's eyes widened. To her it was Christmas, and I was waving candy under her nose. “To first class?”

“To first class.”

“Do they have champagne?”

“They have champagne.”

“And those hot towels?”

“I haven’t seen them yet, but I bet they do.”

It was like watching a bowling ball thrown by an expert hand, the way she rolled up the aisle to first class. I stood there marveling at her zeal. Marika tackled life the way chocoholics tackled the Easter Bunny. She vanished through the curtain.

A moment later, Takis shrieked, high, girlish, and bloodcurdling. I winced as he yelled, “Get it away from me!”

“Is that any way to speak to your wife, eh?”

“What are you doing here? Where are the children?”

“With Stavros. He offered to babysit.”

“Katerina, I am going to kill you!” he screamed.

My backside dropped into Marika’s vacated seat. I hunched down, hoping no one would look at me. Too late—most heads were spinning in my direction. Oh boy. I should have stayed in my seat but I couldn’t handle another moment of sharing air with Takis. Marika could handle it. She slept next to Takis every night—by choice.

Across the aisle there was movement. A wiry, everyman type of guy squeezed out of his seat. He eyed me sideways, and then began working his way forward. At first I figured he was headed to the bathroom, but then something silver in his back pocket winked at me as he reached back.

Federal air marshal. Yikes!

I slumped down further, pulled my hoodie up, tried not to look like a criminal—which I wasn’t, despite my family being one hundred percent Greek mafia on Dad’s side.

The air marshal vanished through the dark blue curtain.

“Family,” I said to the people beside me, who still seemed on edge. “I only recently met them.” They blinked at me.

“Who is a-yelling?” Takis had switched to his idea of English. “I’m not a-yelling. What is your problem, man?”

From back here I couldn’t hear anything but a low hum of voices trying to reason with a crazy Greek.

“What is that? I can’t understand you,” Takis went on. “Try talking from a hole that is not between your ass cheeks, eh?”

There was a loud thud, then Takis yelled. Everything went silent. Not a word from the passengers.

That lasted thirty seconds before everybody began chattering. A

few nosy souls—to be honest, they looked Greek—scurried to the curtain to peek.

“He’s hogtied in the aisle,” one of them announced to the rest of us. “Looks like he took a Taser to the keister.” Okay, so maybe Greek-American, like me.

Half of coach cheered. Not the couple next to me. They were still recovering from the Marika-thon they’d endured from Athens to wherever we were. They took turns shooting frightened glances at me the rest of the way to JFK.

“Good morning, folks. We’ve begun our descent into New York, where it’s an already balmy seventy-eight degrees Fahrenheit. The sun is shining. Gonna be a beautiful day ...”

A beautiful day. I was off to a great start. The backup I didn’t want was hogtied in first class. We’d managed to break the law before stepping foot in the country. First order of business was going to be springing Takis out of Sing Sing, Attica, or possibly even Gitmo. Not the sort of places where Grandma and Xander could swoop in with a helicopter they’d bought from the local cops—something I’d watched them do just days ago. I’d miss my connecting flight to PDX, for sure.

Out the oval window, New York appeared—eight-point-five million shades of gray. Up ahead, the blue curtain heaved like an angry sea. Marika broke through, engines at full steam. She slammed to a stop beside me.

“Go back to your seat. I don’t want to look at my husband.”

The woman beside me whimpered. I knew how she felt.

Predictably, an assortment of cops was waiting for us. They shoved their way onto the plane the moment the jet bridge clanked into place, and dragged Takis away.

He threw a handful of Greek words at us on the way past. “Don’t call Baboulas. She will kill me.” It wasn’t a metaphor or an exaggeration. Takis was one of Grandma’s best henchmen, and he was blood, but that didn’t mean Grandma wouldn’t stuff him in a speed bump.

“Do you know him?”

The curious mouth belonged to a plainclothes cop of some flavor. He flipped open a leather wallet, flashed some ID, but I was too rattled to make a note of his name or which department he worked for. His face was grim and he looked overdue for a gallon of coffee and early retirement.

“Kind of,” I said, wondering where I was supposed to draw the line in the sand. Tell him Takis was a cousin’s cousin’s cousin? A

henchman? That I suspected Takis had cut off a serial killer's head and stuffed it in a jute sack a couple of weeks ago? "Am I in trouble?"

"You?" He shook his head. "No. The Air Marshal told me he made a death threat."

I laughed and hoped it didn't sound fake-o. "He does that all the time. Family. Can't live with them—"

"Can't kill them?"

The laugh died a swift, bloodless death in my mouth. In my Family you could kill them ... and occasionally did.

"I could definitely live without him. But he's harmless."

He shot a glance toward the rear of the plane. Most of the other passengers had cleared out, but a few were still stumbling toward the light, heads bowed over the portable extensions of their brains. "You'll probably get him back. We just want to ask him a few questions, put the fear of waterboarding into him."

I watched, open-mouthed, as Marika tried to sneak out the plane's arched door. She hustled through, conspicuously inconspicuous. Not five seconds later, she reappeared, hustling in reverse. The air marshal was back and he knew Marika was mixed up in this ... misunderstanding. Which was why he was herding her back into the plane. She fell into line beside me, face like a dog who'd left something special in its owner's shoe.

"I do not think we can take them all," she said out of the side of her mouth. "But maybe we can take one down with us."

"We're not taking anyone down!" I hissed. "They'll throw us in prison, no questions asked."

"Okay, so that was not one of my better ideas. What is your plan?"

"I was going to go with cooperating."

"That is a good plan. I wish I had thought of that."

"I might cut off all my hair," Marika said. "What do you think?"

"I think you should wait before making any snap decisions."

Five hours, that's how long we'd been waiting for Homeland Security to squeeze Takis and toss the peel. The authorities had cut Marika and me loose after a few invasive questions. By then our connecting flight was long gone. Lucky for us we were in the terminal, where we had access to coffee, magazines, and restrooms. Who knew what Takis had? Probably latex gloves, lube, and all the water he could gargle.

"You should call Baboulas," Marika said.

"Takis said not to."

"Who listens to anything Takis says? Not me. Not our children."

“Wait a minute—why do *I* have to call her? He’s your husband.”

“Better the bad news comes from you. She likes you.”

I groaned inwardly and pulled out my phone. Was I really about to beg for Takis’ freedom and life?

The phone jittered in my hand. Incoming call from, of all people, Grandma. I looked up at the security cameras. No part of me would be surprised to learn she could see us. She had an unnatural number of fingers, and they were stuck in pies worldwide.

I answered with a cautious, “Hello?”

“Takis will be rejoining you in a minute,” she said. The call ended.

“Huh.” I looked at the silent phone in my hand.

“Who was that?”

“Grandma.”

“Did you tell her about Takis.”

Was she serious? “I’m sitting right here. Did you hear me mention Takis?”

“I was busy thinking about food. What is a ‘Cinnabon’?”

“It’s a cinnamon bun as big as your head. Grandma said Takis is on his way back.”

“Come on,” she said, pulling me up. “I want to see a cinnamon bun as big as my head.”

“What about Takis?”

“No cinnamon bun for him.”

Portland’s sky was tie-dyed blue. I half-expected to see ironic phrases scrawled across it in white smoke. Beards hung from every other chin. In a month or so the streets would be suffocating under a blanket of checked flannel. The plaid plague of hipsters was spreading as former Californians rode their bicycles north. The scent of roasting coffee beans wafted across the city, triggering my salivary glands. I needed coffee and I needed it now ... preferably with a brownie.

Nobody honked, yelled, or flipped me off when I stepped off the curb—a sure sign that we were no longer in Greece.

“That was not so bad,” Marika said cheerfully as we rolled our bags toward the cabstand.

Takis stopped dead center of the zebra crossing. An airport shuttle honked. My cousin’s, cousin’s cousin stuck his hand in the air, facing the shuttle. In Greece the hand gesture was an insult; here it was something the driver was supposed to converse with.

“Not too bad?” Takis said.

“Do not complain,” his wife said, “you can still walk.”

“Do you know why I can walk?”

Marika snorted. "I have a feeling you are about to tell us."

"Not 'us'. Katerina is not in this conversation."

"I'm really not," I said. And I wasn't. Where I was was up on the sidewalk, head down, rolling my luggage toward a line of cabs.

"See?" Takis said. "I can walk because I have had a giant pain in my *kolos* for several years now so I am used to it. Do you know what that pain in my *kolos* is called?"

"I have a feeling you will tell me that, too."

"Marika."

"What?"

"No—that is the name of the giant pain in my ass: Marika."

"Are you saying I am fat?"

I smiled at the cabdriver at the front of the line and hoped it came across as more friendly, less undead. He leaped out, got busy loading my luggage.

"Who said you were fat?" Takis went on. "Now you are twisting my words into traps so that you can snare me and cut off my *poutsas* and turn me into a shadow of a man ... A woman—you want to turn me into a woman."

"Tell that to Baboulas. Tell her a woman is a shadow of a man, and then tell me what she says, eh? If you can still speak after she cuts off your head and jams it on a spike. Katerina?" Marika's head swiveled on its stick. "Tell him."

"Just pretend I'm not here," I said. Because that's what I was doing—pretending I was somewhere else, with peace, a hammock, and a plate of sushi.

"Are they with you?" the cab driver asked me.

"Yes and no." I climbed into the cab's back seat, stuck my head out the window. "Are you guys coming?"

Marika gathered up her things and began jogging toward the cab. The driver watched in horrified silence. Marika was a lot of woman. His face said he was having that dream again, the one where he was stuck to the ground in Pamplona, with a bull gunning for his cab.

"It's okay," I said. "She's house-trained."

"Not my house I'm worried about," he muttered.

Home sweet home. Compared to Grandma's shack, the house I'd grown up in looked downright fancy. The neighborhood was middle class. The neighbors rolled their garbage cans to the curb every Wednesday night and rolled them back in on Thursday evening. They kept their lawns neat, their gardens attractive in a low-key we-garden-when-we-can-be-bothered way. Cars were late model, streets were patched

regularly, and there weren't too many registered sex offenders in a half-mile radius. My family home was white with gray trim. The roof had a couple more winters in it before it would need replacing. For nine months out of the year, Portland worked hard on its city-wide build-a-moss installation. There were roofs around the city where green was the primary color.

The cab driver dumped our luggage on the sidewalk, pocketed the fare and his tip. Then he roared off, leaving us standing in a small cloud of sadness and pollution.

"Kat's back!" a voice said. "Take a look at this."

In the privacy of my own head I groaned and slowly turned around, preparing for the worst. Reggie Tubbs had lived next-door for eons. The former judge spent most of his time on the porch in a rocking chair, wearing his bathrobe. Now that he was retired he couldn't quit the loose, comfortable feeling of judicial robes, except now he went naked under the plush cotton. I suspected he'd thrown his black robe over bare skin in court, too. There was no telling how many criminals had been sent to the big house by Judge Nudie.

"Hi, Mr. Tubbs," I said. "How's it going?"

"Who's your friend?" He eyed Marika appreciatively. "You want to take a look at Reggie Junior?"

Marika elbowed me. "What is he saying?"

Reluctantly, I translated. Marika spoke some English, but hers was limited to stiff, high school phrases.

She beamed. "Of course I want to see his grandson. I love children."

"Not his grandson."

"Puppy?"

"No."

"Kitten?"

"No."

"Pet turtle?"

I thought about it. "Kind of."

"Oh." Realization dawned on her face. "I did not know America had pigs, too."

"Pretty much every country has them."

"Tell him I want to see it. Tell him I have never seen one that old before."

"I can't—"

Marika arched her eyebrows. "Tell him."

I passed the message to Reggie, who immediately dumped his backside back in his chair.

"This whole only flashing women who want to look at Junior isn't working out so good," he said. "It's bad for my self-esteem."

“Rejection will do that. Why don’t you adjust the demographic to, say, women your own age?” With low to no standards.

He rubbed his head until the white wisps looked like the backend of a yeti. “Why the heck would I want to do that? You want me to scare the dickens out of Junior? He’d up and slap me. You ever been slapped in the face with a salami?”

I didn’t want to say yes. Porn today had a lot to answer for.

“Has anyone been to the house?” I asked.

The retired judge missed nothing. He had been the sole witness to Dad’s hasty retreat from our family home, in the arms of two men who looked like they belonged on the wrong side of the courtroom.

“Just the usual suspects,” he said. “Crazy cult people, little girls peddling cookies, and some asswipe who said he was a cop.”

“A cop?”

“*Said* he was a cop. Maybe he was, maybe he wasn’t, but he didn’t look like a cop.”

“What does a cop look like?” Detective Nikos Melas flashed into my mind. Naked, glorious, and for some inexplicable reason, oiled up. Melas had a face somewhere between model and god. He was five-eleven, dark-haired, copper-skinned, with eyes the color of good chocolate. Zeus would have tapped that and then turned him into a pony for Hera.

“Around here? Not like the Terminator. If old Mrs. Jessup down the street hadn’t been running her leaf blower I would’ve heard his gears clacking.”

For the record, ‘old’ Mrs. Jessup was a good fifteen years his junior.

“Can you describe him—besides the Terminator thing?”

“Guy had a face like a mountain’s ass. I’ve seen softer granite.”

“American?”

“Yeah, while we were having a tea party he said he was born in a Kansas cornfield. Doesn’t get more American than that.”

“Really?”

“Nah, I’m just screwing with you. He didn’t sound like a foreigner, but what do I know. The Ruskie trained their spies to be Americans. They built replica towns. Their agents ate at McDonald’s like any other schmo. Wouldn’t have known they weren’t us when they opened their mouths. Yeah, he sounded American. Couldn’t pin a state on his forehead, but then I wasn’t trying. He was just some asshole.”

“Did he ask anything?”

“You got any friends who got a thing for older men?”

“How much older?”

He stared at me.

I stared back.

"They're all married," I said.

"So?"

"Did he ask questions?"

"My memory isn't what it used to be."

Yeah, right. The former judge was sharper than a shard of glass punched out of a truck stop restroom window. My head swiveled to let my eyes get a good look at the new Lexus in his driveway. For years he'd driven a Mercedes, but when Grandma drugged me and shot me back home a couple of weeks ago on her private plane, I'd noticed he had new wheels. Reggie told me the old car had burned up in a fire.

"Did they ever figure out who set your Mercedes on fire?"

Reggie Tubbs shook his head. "Too many suspects, they said. I guess I pissed a lot of people off, what with sending them to prison and all."

"They're sure it was a former foe?"

"Who else would it be? Now that I'm thinking about it, he asked when I'd last seen you."

"Me?"

"You and Mike. Say, did Mike show up?"

"Not yet."

He shook his head, sucking air through his teeth. "Bad business. Got to wonder what they wanted with a guy who drives a truck for a living. I've known Mike a long time. He's one of the good ones."

My heart hurt; I missed Dad like crazy.

Marika was starting to jiggle beside me. "I have to pee," she said.

I handed her the keys, pointing out the one that opened the front door. Verbally, I sketched out a quick map of the bathroom's location. The house had two and a half, none of them with a wastebasket for toilet paper. Greek plumbing gagged on paper, so nobody lived dangerously; they tossed their used paper—yellow or brown—into a basket beside the toilet. Unlike her husband, Marika was America-trained, so I knew she understood things like flushing toilet paper.

"Yeah," I said, after Marika vanished inside. "You have to wonder."

"He'll be back," Reggie went on. "Don't worry, they won't stuff him in a bridge alongside Jimmy Hoffa."

"You can't really do that safely, you know. It compromises the integrity of the structure."

Marika trotted back out, keys in hand. "Have you got any unusual art in your house?"

My eyes narrowed. "Unusual how?"

"Sculptures that look like dead people."

"No. No sculptures that look like dead anything."

She looked at me. I stared back as my neurons forged connections. It was a slow process—I'd been awake for what felt like days.

"Holy crap on a cracker!" I yelped, bolting for the front door. My feet backpedaled fast when the stench of slow-baked corpse punched me in the nose. There was a dead man, all right. Dead as dead gets. He was hunched on the floor in front of the widescreen television I gave Dad two Christmases ago. From the doorway I couldn't see his face, and I wasn't about to get any closer.

"I have to call the police," I whimpered.

Marika peered in over my shoulder. "Call Takis," she said matter-of-factly. "He will know what to do."

Takis was in the doghouse, also known as the Holiday Inn. If I called him he'd show up and inflict himself on us. If I didn't I'd be stuck with a dead body, at least until the cops showed up. Then there would be questions, followed by more questions, and stern looks. But, I reasoned, if anyone knew what to do with a corpse without asking lots of questions, it was Takis.

Suddenly I was glad Grandma had made him tag along. Well ... almost glad. This was Takis we were talking about.

Chapter 2

TAKIS ROLLED up fifteen minutes later in a white van; rented, by the looks of it, from Abductions R Us. He swaggered over to the porch, grinning.

“You need me.”

Jesus Christ on a rice cake. “I confess nothing.”

“I want to hear you say you need me.”

Marika rolled her eyes so hard she could have scored a strike. “Just do something about the body, eh?”

Takis muttered something about how Greece had shucked more than its share of oppressors, yet he couldn’t manage to get rid of his wife. But he went inside. When he reappeared a couple of minutes later, he tossed me his phone.

“Know him?”

I was looking at a picture of a dead man who had gained—I assumed—inches of gas bloat in death. He was puffed up like Elvis Presley during year five of his addiction to pills and fried peanut butter-and-banana sandwiches. The only normal thing about this was his everyman outfit of khakis and what looked like a white polo shirt.

“I don’t know.”

“Shave off twenty kilos and imagine his purplish skin as white.”

I was trying, I really was. But it’s hard to look at a corpse and imagine the possibilities. “How many pounds is twenty kilos?” It wasn’t my fault; the dead man in my house was interfering with my ability to do basic math.

“Americans,” Takis said.

On the porch next door, Reggie cleared his throat. “What’s going on over there? You having some kind of Greekfest? ‘Cause I don’t mind going Greek once in a while.”

“We’re deciding where to eat out,” I told him.

He thought about it for a moment. “There’s a new place down in Tigard, near the mall.”

Tigard was southwest of here, one of Portland’s outer suburbs, and home to the Washington Square Mall.

“They’re picky eaters,” I told him.

“I hear you. Can’t eat like I used to.” He sat back down, robe clutched tight around his potbelly frame. “Everything goes through me like shit through a goose. The pudding days aren’t too far away.”

Takis nudged me. “Who is this malakas?”

“Neighbor,” I said in Greek. “Are you going to get rid of the you-know-what?”

The henchman shrugged. “And put him where? In Greece it’s a different story. But here? Where do other people put the corpses they find in their living rooms?”

I didn’t think dead bodies were a common feature in most suburban American homes. “Can’t you roll him in a carpet and dump him somewhere?”

“Do you have carpet?”

“Hardwood floors.”

“Then how can I roll him in a carpet?”

“So ...” I squinted. “What are you going to do about him?”

Another shrug. “Nothing until after dark. I can’t get him out of here alone, not without a hand truck or a wagon.”

“Or,” I said, “you can pull into the garage and load him up?”

“Or ... I could do that. But you will have to help me carry him.”

My gaze slid toward Marika. “I could be wrong but that sounds more like a sidekick’s job ...”

“I just remembered I have to do a thing,” Marika muttered, and bolted toward the door. She covered her nose with one hand and went diving in.

“So much for that,” I said.

Takis shook his head. “If she has to *kaka* that will kill any smell that dead man is making. You got keys for that car in the garage?”

I shook my key ring at him. He grabbed it and vanished in to the house. A moment later the garage door began to grind.

Reggie was inspecting Takis. “He family or something?”

“Distant. Very distant. The way bears and dogs are related.”

He grunted. “You all got the same nose—you, Mike, and that one.”

Something occurred to me. “That cop who wasn’t a cop ... Do you remember what he was wearing?”

“Yeah. He was in those khaki flat front pants young guys wear today. Whatever happened to good old pleats? And he had on a white polo shirt. He was so big it looked like a prophylactic stretched over —”

Yikes. “Did you see him leave?” I said, cutting him off.

“Didn’t get to see the big send off. The phone rang so I went inside.” His eyes narrowed. “Why? He spring a leak on your door or something?”

Headshake. “Just curious.”

Takis spent the next five minutes playing musical automobiles. He parked my Jeep on the street, followed by Dad’s car, and then pulled the abduction-mobile inside. Down rolled the door.

Reggie watched the whole thing. Ask me, he looked too interested.

“My cousin’s a painter,” I said. “He’s painting the downstairs.”

The old judge grunted. “Tell him if he wants more work my place could use a fresh coat, too.”

No way did I want to go back inside, so I made all kinds of excuses to stay outside, where the air and view were corpse-free. First I trotted to the mailbox and emptied out a week or so worth of mail—mostly junk. I made a note on my phone to have the mail held until I was done with all this back and forth between home and Greece. While I was emptying the box, I discreetly glanced up and down the street for signs of crazed killers who enjoyed murdering people in my house. That’s if the guy inside had been murdered. For all I knew it was natural causes. He broke into the house and—BAM—stealth heart attack. Which kind of served him right for breaking in to begin with.

Nothing in the neighborhood looked out of place, which, if this had been a horror movie, was a sure sign something Great and Terrible was about to happen—if the dead guy wasn’t enough. The air was hot. The sky was a clear blue with slashes of white. Bugs and birds sang their discordant songs. Somewhere nearby a lawn was being mowed.

My stomach clenched. Everything looked fine from out here, but underneath the smooth surface the world was out of whack.

Then I spotted the car. A blue heap, that had last been new in the 80s, was tootling in this direction, a tail of granite smoke wagging at the rear. The neighborhood was flat, but the automobile was struggling to make it to its final destination.

It pulled up at the opposite curb. The driver stuck his head out.

“I’m looking for a date. How much?”

I rolled my eyes and gagged. The kid behind the junker’s wheel was Donk. Aka: Yiorgos, Baby Dimitri’s teenage nephew. He was at that age where his personality revolved around his penis. Donk was a hundred and twenty pounds of teenage boy in clothes for a middleweight. They didn’t fit him in all the fashionably right places. Somehow—I suspected Greek sorcery—Baby Dimitri had dumped him in my lap to learn how organized crime worked. As if I knew.

My hands went to my hips. “What are you doing here?”

“Going to the Playboy Mansion.”

“It’s in California.”

“I know where it is: Los Angeles.”

Greeks have a hard time with the letter G. Their tongues hammer it into a misshapen K.

“*Xhollywood*,” he added.

Also, their H isn’t allowed to leave the mouth alone. They stick it to an X or T and tell it to hold hands.

Hollywood didn’t sound right. “I think it’s in Beverly Hills.”

"Xhollywood."

"Beverly Hills."

"Who cares where it is? That's where I'm going."

I looked at the junker he'd acquired. It was held together with prayer and duct tape. "In that? You'll never make it that far."

His forehead scrunched as much as a teenaged forehead can scrunch. "How far?"

Math wasn't my thing, but converting miles to kilometers was an easier task now that I'd obtained some distance from the shock of the dead man in my living room. One mile was one-point-six kilometers. "About sixteen hundred kilometers." I did some extra number wrangling because his confusion was solidifying. "A fourteen-hour drive. Maybe a little more."

"Fourteen hours?"

"Fourteen. It's more than thirteen, fewer than fifteen."

"I know how much fourteen is."

"You don't look sure."

He shoved bravado down on top of the confusion, returning to his usual smart-ass mode. "How can it be that far? It's this far away on the map." He held up two fingers, an inch of air between them.

Oh boy. "What map?"

He pulled out his cell phone, scrolled and tapped like someone who'd been plugged into the Matrix since birth, handed it to me. I stared at Google Maps in disbelief.

"See this dot?" I pointed to Portland. "That's where we are right now." I zoomed out until the map evolved into one of the northern hemisphere. "And this dot? Volos. Phones make big things look small. They have to—it's a four inch screen."

His chin jutted out. "I don't believe you."

I tossed the phone back to him. "So don't believe me then. Get the map to calculate the distance and travel time for you."

He fiddled with the phone a moment, until his eyes popped halfway out of his head.

"Fourteen hours," he whispered. Then he burst into tears.

Reggie Tubbs got out of his chair and shuffled to the edge of the porch, hand shielding his eyes. "What's that boy crying about?"

"The distance from Portland to the Playboy Mansion."

"Yeah, that's a thing worth crying over, all right. Could be I've cried about it myself a night or two." He went back to his chair, his attention on Mrs. Bean, lugging groceries from her Subaru to her house across the street.

I turned back to the weeping kid. "You really came all this way to visit the Playboy Mansion? Then why didn't you fly to Los Angeles?"

"Maybe I was also following you."

“Maybe? I didn’t know teenagers could catch international flights alone.”

“I had a permission slip.”

There was the boom-crash of Mom and Dad’s screen door flying open, slapping the siding as Marika’s palm gave it a whack. “You!” she bellowed.

Donk looked like he was about to shrink to fit in his own droopy pocket.

“What’s she doing here?”

“She’s my sidekick,” I told him.

Marika rushed to where we were standing. She got up in Donk’s face with a freshly sharpened finger. “I’m going to make you eat wood!”

Eating wood was one of those things that sounded sexual but wasn’t. Eating wood meant being on the receiving end of a spanking. Which also sounded sexual (thank you, *Fifty Shades of Grey*) but wasn’t. Well ... not always. I had no doubt Marika could feed him the kind of wood that would knock his block off. She had wild children. She also had Takis.

Donk ducked behind me. “Make her go away,” he whimpered.

A week ago he’d aligned himself with a group of assassins who had been plotting to kill me. This week he expected me to be his rock. But I couldn’t bring myself to step aside to let Marika have him, mostly because he was holding me in place.

“Let go,” I hissed.

“No.”

“Let him go,” Marika said.

The front screen flew open a second time. Takis strode out on his toothpick legs.

“What is he doing here?” he wanted to know.

“Looking for the Playboy Mansion,” I said.

Takis glanced around. “It’s around here somewhere, isn’t it?”

I stared at him. I couldn’t help myself. The ignorance was strong with this one, and he was treading water in my family’s gene pool. Takis struck me as the kind of guy who didn’t think twice about peeing in pools.

“Fourteen hours south,” I said. “At least.”

“No!” Takis said. “It can’t be.”

“And yet it is,” I said.

Takis pulled out his phone, did some tapping. His face turned to stone. The phone vanished into his pocket. Obviously not a fan of being wrong. “We should put the brat in your dungeon. He’s Baby Dimitri’s spy.”

My eyebrows crawled up my forehead. “I don’t have a dungeon.

We're civilized."

"Basement?"

"No basement."

His head tilted like a dog's. "Where do you put your prisoners?"

"Don't have prisoners."

"Enemies?"

"I didn't have any enemies until I went to Greece. Greece is the only place where people want me dead."

"Deep freezer?"

My mouth sagged open. I had to work to snap it back into position. "It doesn't work."

"Perfect."

"It is?"

"What kind of animal keeps a prisoner in a working freezer? That is inhumane."

My blinks and twitches were coming faster now. "Okay ..."

"You're not putting him in the freezer," Marika said.

Takis threw his hands in the air. "Here we go. Now my wife is telling me how to do my job. Do I tell you how to do your job?"

"All the time," she said. "Leave the boy to me. I will take care of him."

"Yes, because you take such good care of our children. Tell me, where are they right now?"

"With Stavros, who they adore. There is a man who knows how to care for children."

I grabbed Donk's elbow. "Let's back away slowly. I don't want to get a rabies shot."

"Rabies?" There was genuine fear in his eyes.

Okay, maybe not rabies, but definitely some kind of mad Greek disease. Takis acted like a carrier. I backed us up to the piece of crap car. "Where did you get this thing? Because I know you're too young to rent one."

"I borrowed it."

Borrowed, my butt. More like stole it from some poor person who was probably grateful. "Did you steal it?"

"No. Yes." He tilted his head and put on a dopey expression. "Can you define 'steal'?"

"You're grounded," I said.

"You are not my mother, even though you are almost old—"

I held up my hand, *moutsas* be damned. "Finish that sentence and you die."

"Okay," Takis called out. "I have decided the kid can help me with that big problem inside."

Donk glanced from Takis to me, and back again. "What problem? I

don't like problems. They always mean I have to do work."

"Congratulations." Takis grinned at him. His grin wasn't a pretty one. "You have won a greater share of the work. Now get your worthless *kolos* in the house, and if you tell anyone what we do in there I will kill you."

"And that's not a metaphor," I said.

Donk's expression was blank. "What is a metaphor?"

I shook my head. "Should have stayed in school, kid."

Mr. Teenage Puniverse puffed his chest out as best he could—which wasn't far—and followed Takis into the house.

"Well, this is fun," Marika said, eyeing me. "Here I am in America again and all I have seen so far is a dead man and an old man's *poutsas*. How can I put either of those things on Facebook?" She shot me a meaningful look.

"Reggie didn't actually show it to you." In a weak moment, I took the bait. "Do you ... want to go do something?"

"Wonderful idea. We should do that. I am glad you thought of it." She hoisted her massive handbag onto her load-bearing shoulder. "Now, where are we going?"

An hour later we were dying of old age in the line outside Voodoo Doughnut. Every day at Voodoo is like the original opening week of *The Empire Strikes Back*.

"Takis and the child can have one of those," Marika said, checking out the menu on my phone. She was pointing to the Cock-N-Balls doughnut, a cakey confection stuffed with Bavarian cream and smothered in chocolate frosting. "It looks like a big, black snake I saw in a movie once."

"What movie was this?"

"*Snakes on a Plane*."

I gave her a look.

"That is my story and I am sticking to it," she said. "My husband and that child need these."

"What are you going to have?"

"One of everything else."

"You never had a doughnut before?"

"Not shaped like a monster." She tapped on my phone. "Look at this. Adorable. Greeks make their food shaped like food. Although one time Papou brought Takis a loaf shaped like a *poutsas*. Takis gave it to Stavros."

Papou was Grandma's advisor, what the Sicilians called a Consigliere. He had a half-hearted death wish, a gun rack on his

wheelchair, and an eagle named Yiorgos. The bird was an inheritance, of sorts, from his now-dead nephew, a kook with a penchant for eagles. Papou was nobody's grandfather, but everyone called him that anyway.

An hour later, we were back home, hauling enough doughnuts to throw the entire Portland Police Bureau into a diabetic coma. As soon as I threw open the front door, the smell punched me in the face. The body was gone but the smell lived on.

"Good grief, it stinks in here," I said.

Takis and Donk had helped themselves to Dad's widescreen TV. They'd planted themselves on the sofa, feet on my mother's coffee table. Wherever Mom was she was currently wishing for a sharp axe and a corporeal body. In life, my mother had been an easygoing woman, but no one—no one—put their shoes on her coffee table.

"You are the women," Takis said without taking his eyes off the screen. "Cleaning is your job. We are just the muscle." He hooked a thumb at Donk. "Okay, that one has no muscle. I am the muscle."

My eyebrows took a short hike to a higher altitude. Takis' muscle was all in his mouth. "We brought doughnuts."

"Oh boy," Donk said. "I love *donknuts*. What kind did you get?"

Marika flipped open the first box, delivered the bad news.

Takis peered into the box, sniffed, went back to the TV. "I am not putting that in my mouth."

"Me either," said Donk. "I'm all about the ladies. Didn't they have any *mounis*?"

"Sure," I said. "They're sitting on the couch."

"More for us." Marika picked up one of the chocolate-frosted wieners, bit off the end. Donk winced. "This is how you tell the men from the boys. A man would not care. He would eat the doughnut, even if it looked like a *pouts*. I bet Xander would eat the *pouts*-shaped doughnut."

"Xander would cut it into pieces first," Takis said. I had the feeling he meant it.

I dumped the other box on the kitchen counter, went back to the living room where I shoved Takis' shoes off the coffee table using my foot.

"Did you get rid of ... you know?" I asked him.

Eyes on the TV: "Not yet. We do it tonight."

"So he's still in the garage?"

"Unless you want me to put him in one of the bedrooms."

I shook my head. "No. That's fine. Any idea who he was?"

"You did not tell me to look. You said get rid of the body."

"Maybe we should look before you ... you know. And by *we* I mean *you*."

“What do I get if I do this?”

Marika pinned one of her eyebrows an inch higher. “You get to not be divorced.”

Takis did two palms up. “Who asked you? I was talking to Katerina!”

“I am her sidekick.”

“You are my wife. Go home.” Takis got up and began poking through the other boxes. He picked up one of Marika’s monsters. “Heh. This one looks like you when you are bleeding,” he said to his wife. “Rawr! Rawr!”

Marika spat in the box. “Enjoy your doughnuts.”

Chapter 3

AFTER I LOADED up with carbs I finally had a chance to escape the circus. The bickering followed me up the stairs, until I shut my parents' bedroom door.

Bliss.

I wasn't used to this family thing. Not that I didn't love them—they were growing on me, like thrush—but sometimes it was nice to do all that loving from a distance ... behind two locked doors.

Alone at last, I plopped down on the cool porcelain edge of the bathtub and considered the medicine cabinet on the wall. Behind it was the safe Dad installed the year I turned ten. Until a few weeks ago, I hadn't seen the inside of the safe since that same year. There hadn't been any need for me to go digging through my parents' treasure. Necessity (being mostly broke after Grandma had my workplace burned down to keep me in Greece) had driven me to go hunting for a temporary loan. That's when I'd discovered Dad's stash of secrets.

After I double-checked the bathroom door was locked, I lifted the cabinet off the wall, leaned it against the tub. Dad, non-traditionalist, had chosen the date he landed in America as the safe's combination. I twiddled the dial. The door popped open.

My heart squeezed for a moment before getting on with its one job. A piece of me had expected to yank the safe open and find everything gone or something new. Instead, everything was disappointingly the same—*exactly* the same. For some reason—you know, because of the dead guy in my house—I really had expected to find it empty, or at the very least, disturbed. Whatever the dead guy had been doing in my family's house, he hadn't known about the safe ... or made it that far.

Also I'd be lying my tail off if I said I hadn't been hoping for a little something extra in the safe. Something to indicate Dad was a free man again—maybe downgraded to a free man in hiding. Which was so much less terrifying than his current status as 'kidnapped'.

Not wanting to put anything on my phone—this one was Family-bought—I got to work with a pen and notepad, jotting down the names and nationalities in the passports, along with dates and places visited. Italy was a favorite destination, it looked like, and Germany wasn't far behind. Dad was looking fifty shades of shady.

My phone rang. Grandma was on the other end.

“What are you doing?” she wanted to know.

Panic streaked through my veins, until I remembered she was being Greek and that chances were slim—although not impossible—that she had set up cameras in the bathroom. Greeks don’t ask how you are; they want to know what you’re doing. What you’re doing is always more interesting than how you feel about it.

“Thanks for sending Takis with me,” I said, dumping a load of sarcasm on the sentiment. “You didn’t give me a chance to say that earlier.”

“You are welcome.” Not a hint that she sensed my dollop of sarcasm. “Takis tells me there was a dead man in your house.”

She had called him first—of course she had. He was one of her best henchman; I was just her granddaughter.

“Not for long.”

“You did not call the police?”

“I wanted to, but Takis is taking care of it.”

She made an approving noise, and it occurred to me that like it or not, I had rolled slightly toward the dark side. Got a dead body in your house? Call the police. Everybody with a moral compass that points to Good or even Decent Enough knows that. Yet my first and only call had been to someone who knew how to make bodies vanish. True, my instinct had been to yell for the police, but did Marika twist my arm and force me to call Takis? That was a big, fat nope.

“Why was there a dead man in your house?”

“Probably because someone killed him,” I said. “Or he was unlucky enough to just die here.”

There was a pause as she processed my smart-assery. “I swear, sometimes it is like I am talking to your father. Who was he?”

“I don’t know, and I’m not about to touch him to find out. Takis said he required some kind of restitution to look.” Take that, Takis. This is what he got for following Grandma’s orders.

“He did, did he? I will take care of Takis.”

A short stretch of silence passed before I realized she had ended the call without bothering to warn me—again.

A moment later there was a knock at the bedroom door.

“Katerina,” Takis said, “I am going to kill you. But if you tell Baboulas, make sure she understands that is an empty threat.”

My voice rose an octave—maybe two. Any higher and I could smash crystal. “Christ on a skateboard, he’s a cop? He’s a cop! A for-real policeman? Reggie said he’d pegged him for a fake.”

Takis flicked the leather badge case at me. “Portland Police—

whatever that word is. The letters make no sense.”

With shaking hands, I flipped it open. “Bureau. Portland Bureau of Police.”

“See, I would have said *boo-ree-aw*. English is a disaster.”

“That’s because we borrowed some of it from the Greeks.”

“That is funny. You know how funny? So funny I forgot to laugh.”

I inspected the badge. “Holy crapola, he’s a detective. Why is there a dead police detective in my parents’ house?” I looked at Takis. He looked at me. “Okay, so I come from a family of criminals, but still. Why is there a dead police detective in my house?”

“Maybe it was his time. Natural causes.”

That was a slightly more cheerful thought. “Really?”

“No. Someone garroted him.”

I pitched the badge at his head after carefully wiping it with my shirt. I watched TV, I knew about stuff like fingerprints. “I hate you.”

“We should make a club,” Marika called out from the living room. “We could have T-shirts.”

“I like T-shirts,” I said.

Takis pocketed the badge. “The boy and I are going out to take care of this problem.” He tapped his pocket. “We will take care of this other problem somewhere else. It will take them longer to identify him—if they find him.”

Stars and sparks bopped around the inside of my head. I dropped onto the couch, buried my head in my hands, and tried not to assume the fetal position. A dead police detective in my parents’ house ... why? At what point did he transition from living to dead? Had someone killed him in here or placed him after the fact?

“What are you doing?” Marika asked me.

“Wishing for a time machine.” And a new, less complicated life. Like my old life—minus the secrets.

“If you get one can we go to 1981?”

“What happened in 1981?”

“Charles and Diana’s wedding. I broke one of my mother’s plates and want to replace it before she comes to visit.”

“Sure,” I said. “We can do that.” 1981 sounded good. The world was different then. The fashion was sketchy, but if the time machine was big enough I could take luggage.

Marika snuck a sideways glance at me. “Do you want the remote?”

“No, it’s okay.”

“Good. At home Takis will not let me hold it.”

Takis poked his head in the living room. “Do you have any makeup?”

My eyes narrowed. “What for?”

He shook his head. “No reason.”

“Upstairs bathroom. Take a right at the top of the stairs. Middle drawer.”

He vanished upstairs. When he slunk past again it was with an armful of my cosmetics. I glared at him—hard.

“Please tell me you’re not putting my makeup on the dead guy.”

He stopped. “I am not putting your makeup on the dead guy. That’s the boy’s job.” He vanished into the garage with my favorite palettes that I never used, and several lipsticks I’d forgotten were buried at the bottom of the drawer. Maybe it wasn’t so bad someone was getting to wear them, even if they were too dead to appreciate it.

My phone shuddered on the kitchen counter. The caller ID told me it was Detective Nikos Melas, hot cop, spectacular kisser, and bad idea. Given that my family resided on one side of the law and he was law enforcement, there could never be anything between us except sexual tension and sweaty longing.

He opened with, “You went home and didn’t tell me?”

“Detective Melas, did I hurt your feelings?”

“Where I come from it’s customary to say goodbye to friends when you leave.”

“Hang on,” I said. “Let me ask Marika if that’s really a custom. Because I think you’re making it up.”

“Marika’s there?” He sounded incredulous.

“She’s my sidekick.”

“The best sidekick in history,” Marika said tonelessly from the living room. She had discovered cable TV and its hundreds of channels, and was currently flicking from one reality TV show to the next. “Why are these people hunting ducks? What for do they put this on TV? Who cares? And look,” she called out, “they have made a show about fat people surviving in the woods.”

“Be grateful it’s not Japanese television,” I said.

“Who are you talking to?” she asked me. I told her and she said, “You two need to have sex.”

“I like Marika,” Melas said. His grin was audible. “She’s full of good ideas.”

“She’s full of something,” I muttered. “Did you call because you miss me?”

The grin in his voice widened. “Maybe. How long are you going to be gone?”

“You do know I live here, right?”

“Could be I’m hoping you’ll change your mind. You improve the scenery.”

I sighed on the inside where it counted, and where he couldn’t hear it and gloat. “I’ll be back in a couple of days. I just have some things to do here.”

Good cop that he was, he seized on that. "What things?"

"Things."

"Does this have anything to do with your father's abduction?"

"Pretty much everything in my life is about that," I said. "What do you know about counterfeiting?"

He took a deep breath, blew it out slow. "What I know is that we've seen some counterfeit Euros in the Volos area. Good ones. Which means they are probably out of Naples. There's a village in the area that produces the best. Almost undetectable, except—"

"They feel different," I murmured.

That got his attention. "Have you seen one?"

"No. I just heard about them, that's all."

"Heard where?"

"Around. Is this your case?"

He sighed like I was busting his balls. "Different department. But if I heard anything I would pass it on." He lowered his voice. "Look, Katerina, I know the Makris family isn't involved. Baboulas doesn't approve of counterfeiting. To her it's dishonest money. So if you know something ..."

The idea of criminals having morals and standards confused me. Once upon a time, a moral compass was something that pointed black or white. Now I was discovering there were degrees and levels of dodgy.

"I don't know anything," I told him, which would be true if we were talking about fishing or curing bacon.

"Just ... if—when—you do, let me be the first person you call, okay?" His frustration reached across the continent, over an ocean, and over most of another continent, to tug on the strings holding up my guilt.

"Got to go," I said. "Marika's fallen down a well of bad television."

"Yeah, I have to go, too. Stakeout."

"What are you staking out?"

"Hotel in Agria. We've got problems with some Germans. See you soon, Katerina Makris."

Melas knew better than to chop the S off the end of my name. It was mine from birth and I wasn't giving it up without a fight. You can't go around chopping letters off someone's name because they don't have a wiener.

"Bye," I said, but he was already gone.

Now that the call had ended there was a small hollow in my chest and it was filled with a puddle of loneliness.

"He likes you," Marika called out. "He wants to put his thing in your thing."

I flopped down next to her on the couch. "I'm really glad you

weren't more descriptive than that."

She sighed. "This is what happens when you have children. Everything you say is censored before it comes out. Before I used to talk dirty to Takis all the time. Now my idea of talking dirty is reminding him to change his underwear."

There were some places in the universe nobody should go. Takis' dirty underwear was one of them. I made a face and snatched up my phone again. None of the channels Marika landed on interested me, so I figured I'd do some hunting on the Internet. Melas had mentioned a German problem, and I was curious, under the circumstances. Probably there was no connection between his stakeout and the Germans who had passed their freshly made money to a local businessman in Makria.

Okay, yeah, so I was curious about what was going on in Melas's world. It was a crush; I'd get over it.

The Internet came up empty-handed. Whatever was going on in Agria it wasn't big enough to report or loud enough for people to hear about it. That or the cops were keeping it buttoned up tighter than a frog's butt. Even the Crooked Noses Message Board was a dry haul; if it wasn't organized crime they weren't interested.

While I was at it, I searched the dead detective's name. His picture came up instantly. There was no good way to get Reggie to identify him—or not—as the not-a-cop who came to the house. But given that in life the detective had resembled a reverse minotaur—body of a bull, head of a man—and had a glint in his eye like he wouldn't be averse to time travel or showing up naked in an alley, I could see where someone might mistake him for a relentless robot.

"Can we order a pizza? Takis never lets me order pizza." Marika's forehead wrinkled up. "Do we even have pizza delivery in Greece? Who knows?"

"Probably in the cities." I tossed her my phone. "Go for it."

She looked at the phone, looked at me. "What is that for? You want me to call and ... ask?"

"Okay," I said. "I hate calling for pizza, too. I do it a better way."

Thirty seconds later the pizza was on its way, thanks the power of the Internet.

"You can do that?" she asked, wide-eyed.

"Sure. I think you can do pretty much everything online."

"Not everything ..."

"Yes," I said, "even that."

She crossed herself frantically. "It is a miracle ... or a curse. I am not sure which."

"Tell me about it," I said.

Right on time, the doorbell chimed. The neighborhood dogs began to kick up a fuss. When I reached the kitchen with the pizza, Marika was already drooling. She wasn't alone; Takis and Donk were back.

"What did you do with the dead guy?" I asked Takis.

Marika passed him pizza-topped plate. He took a bite. "We put him in a tree house with makeup on his face. The cops will take him for a pervert." He chuckled, cheese and crust tumbling around inside his mouth. Donk laughed, too, until Takis stared him down. "Do not laugh, boy. Death is serious."

Marika dropped her pizza back in the box, teeth marks and all. "You left him in a tree house?"

Shrug. "Sure. Why not?"

"A tree house. A tree house children play in?"

"What is the big deal? I know it is not that time of the month ..."

"You put a dead man in a tree house? Are you crazy? A child could find him! Would you want our children to find a dead man?"

Takis shrugged, took another bite of pizza. "Eventually they will see dead bodies anyway."

She yanked open the kitchen drawers until she found what she was looking for: Mom's big chef's knife. She pointed it at her husband, inches from his nose. "Our sons are not joining the Family business. They are going to school to be something. Go and get that man and put him somewhere else."

"But—"

"Go!"

He hung his head. "Okay."

Donk slouched after him. "Are you going to take that from a woman?"

"That is not a woman," Takis said to the teenager, "that is my wife. One day you will learn the difference."

I grabbed Marika's poised wrist. "Put down the knife. You can kill him later, after they've moved the body, okay?"

"Can I throw pizza at him?"

"No—no throwing pizza."

"Why not?"

"Because I'm hungry."

She sniffed. "I guess I could eat."

Probably I should have sent them to Ladd's Addition. Even if someone found the body they'd never make it out to tell anyone. Ladd's Addition is basically the circles of hell, disguised as a charming wagon wheel-shaped historical district in southeast Portland. People went in and were never seen again. Could be D.B. Cooper was there,

bumbling around for the exit.

We were down half a pie when the doorbell rang again. Rubbing my belly, I dragged myself to the door, squinted through the peephole. There were two men on the doorstep staring directly at me.

“Katerina Makris?”

They knew my name. That couldn’t be good.

“We can see your shadow, so don’t pretend like you ain’t home. Open the door.”

That was going to happen, like, never. Nobody sane opens the door for two strangers, not when they look like runaways from the set of COPS. The guy on the left was vanilla ice cream white but he had a do-rag wrapped around his head. He was a mean kind of skinny and his pants were riding low. If he turned around I knew I’d get an eyeful of his underwear. That kind of guy always calls people things like *G* or *dawg* or *homes*, when you just know he was raised in an upper-middle class home, with two still-married parents; the ‘hood’ was something they wore on their heads when it rained. The mouthpiece of the two was a Latino James Gandolfini, only not dead. His voice had that same breathless quality, like he’d run at least twenty-five feet to grab the last doughnut.

“Hell will freeze over before I open this door,” I said.

They sighed and went digging in their pockets for, I assumed, weapons. I hit the floor with an audible thump.

Marika was already down there. She leopard crawled to where I was cowering. “What is it? What is it?”

“Oh my God,” I whimpered. “They’re here to kill me.”

“Virgin Mary, no!”

She scurried away on all fours. I guess she wasn’t planning to die with me, which was a good idea. She had a passel of kids at home, who deserved to be raised by something better than Takis. She vanished into the kitchen on her hands and knees. There was clanking in one of the cupboards, then she came crawling back with a big gun. It was a monster of a thing, with protrusions all over the place. Looking at it, I wasn’t sure how you fired the thing; every part of it seemed designed to put holes in big, solid objects ... like underground bunkers.

“I bet my gun is bigger than their guns,” she said.

I gawked at the weapon. “Where did you get that?”

“Takis. He bought it from a man under a bridge, like last time we came to America. Do you want one? He bought more.”

“Are they in my house?” My voice was small, weak, a three-legged newborn kitten of a thing.

“Not all of them. He took some with him.”

The doorbell rang again. “Hey, we can hear you in there,” Latino

James Gandolfini said. "You gonna open this door or you want us to open it for you?"

"We good at opening doors," the other one called out.

The first guy lowered his voice. "A month on the street and it's like you've been living in the ghetto your whole life."

"This be how I always speak, yo."

I had a sinking feeling these two clowns weren't here to kill me. Which was good and also bad. At least you knew where you stood with a killer. I peeled myself off the floor, peeped through the door's one eye. They were holding up police badges, no guns in sight. Probably they had them stuffed down the back of their pants.

I wheeled around, looked at Marika, wide-eyed. "Get rid of that gun," I said. "They're policemen."

"Ungh!" she said and scrambled back to the kitchen. Dishes rattled, then I heard the thump of Marika hauling ass up the stairs. My family wasn't big on law enforcement, although they seemed to be okay with Detective Melas, provided he didn't put his hands on me or his nose in Family business.

I peeled myself off the floor and tried to look like I had nothing to hide. It took me a moment; my transgressions were piling up. One more deep breath, then I opened the door.

The big Latino cop peered over my shoulder. "You're jumpy. You expecting trouble?"

"Yeah, I'm jumpy. You look like criminals."

"Vice," the guy with the do-rag mumbled. "We gots to blend in."

"Quit it, Gene," the Gandolfini look-alike said. "This here is Bishop—Detective Bishop. And I'm Detective Lopez. We're looking for a friend of ours." Lopez glanced past me again. "We heard he might be here. You seen him?"

My fingertips were tingling. My chest was tight. "I just got back from Europe this morning. I haven't seen anyone except my next-door neighbor and the pizza delivery guy. Is one of them your friend?"

"No. But we're hoping you can help us find him." His gaze stuck to my face. "Where did you go?"

"Greece."

"Nice, nice." He swayed his head back and forth like a cow. "They've got problems. Big money problems."

"So I hear."

"You haven't seen him?"

"I do not think these policemen are good at being policemen," Marika muttered behind me. She was back, sans guns.

Lopez jerked his chin in her direction. "What did she say?"

"She wants to know where I keep the toilet paper," I said. "Who is this friend of yours? A policeman?" My heart did a few pull-ups. It

knew I had a house full of guns, counterfeit passports, and the invisible stain of a dead cop on the living room rug. Fortunately, these guys didn't have x-ray vision. On the outside I was cool; I'd had a lot of practice lately. So what if I'd almost become one with the doormat when they pulled out their badges? Animal instinct had trampled my common sense.

"Yeah, he's one of ours," Detective Lopez said. "So you haven't seen him?"

"Do you have a picture?"

"You just said you haven't seen anyone except your neighbor and the pizza delivery kid." He pulled his phone out of his pocket, swiped a few times, then held it up so I could get a look at the guy who was, as we were speaking, being moved from a tree house to someplace else.

I shook my head. "Never seen him before." Before today, when he was dead in my house, that is.

"Well, he said he was coming here. I guess he's just late—real late. Mind if we stick around? Of course you don't. We'll be outside, out of your way. You won't hardly know we're there. We'll be the guys in that SUV."

He tilted his head to where a big, black GMC was snuggled up to the curb.

"Can't miss it," I said.

His everything wobbled as he laughed. "I like her, she's funny," he said to his partner. Then he turned back to me, serious. "You can miss it on a dark night, and that's a fact."

"Yo, they never see it coming," Bishop said.

"This guy." Lopez hooked a thumb at Saggy Pants. "But he's right. We ran over a guy five times, used him as a speed bump. He never saw us coming."

"Not after the first time, anyways," Bishop said.

Lopez grinned. "You don't want us to use you as a speed bump."

Yikes! "I have to go."

"Just when we were getting along so good. Say, you sure you haven't seen our friend?"

"Haven't seen him."

He pointed to me with both index fingers. "Just checking. Sometimes answers change. Say, maybe you know the man our friend was looking for."

Mentally, I grabbed my hair and pulled. "Who? Just tell me: who?"

He leaned back so he could get a load of the number on the house. "Seeing as you're here and he lives here, maybe you know Mike Makris."

My gut took a swift ride to my shoes. "He's not here. I don't know

where he is.”

“We know he’s not here. Know how we know?”

“Yo, tell her,” Bishop said.

“I’m getting to that,” Lopez muttered under his breath. To me: “We know because you reported him missing a few weeks back.”

“Not officially,” I said. “I called them and the police didn’t want anything to do with it until he’d been missing for twenty-four hours.”

On the day he went missing I would have welcomed police interest. But things had since snowballed in a problematic, criminal direction.

“So is he still missing?”

“He’s a truck driver. He’s away on business.”

“You got a phone? You should call him, see how business is going.”

“I couldn’t even if I wanted to. He’s out of range. Look, my father is his own man. We have our own lives.”

“Sure you do,” Lopez said. “But you’re his kid. It’s not right for a father to be out of contact. What if something happens and you need him?”

I grabbed the door handle and prepared to slam it in his stupid face. “Go sit in your SUV in the dark. Whatever you’re looking for, you won’t find it here.”

Lopez put on a sad face. “We’re just trying to get a dialog going.”

“You know what I think? I think you’re not a cop.”

“What makes you think that? Is it the clothes? We’re vice. We don’t play by the same rules as the other departments.”

“Those rules can get us dead,” Bishop said.

“What are you really looking for?”

Lopez’s gaze swung from left to right, taking in the territory. “Tell you what—we’re gonna hang around, watch your place in case you have any trouble.”

“It’s a free world,” I told him.

“Not the whole world,” Lopez said. “Just America.”

The Cops Were still parked at the curb, lights off, no movement inside except for the occasional flickering of their cellphones, when Takis and Donk rocked up a couple of hours later. They rattled the back door, cackling when Marika and I leaped out of our skins. The cackling stopped when Marika whipped out her not-so little friend.

“Oh,” she said. “You two. Lucky I did not shoot you.”

Donk puffed out his chest. “Shoot me and my uncle with revenge me.” Takis wheezed with laughter. Donk’s expression shifted to

something between bewildered and offended. "What?"

"If you had any value to Baby Dimitri you would be working for him." Grandma's henchman dropped onto the couch, put his feet up on the coffee table—again. I kicked them off—again. "Instead, he allows you to run away to America like a little girl."

"Keep talking, old man," Donk said, eyes bulging. "I will cut you while you sleep." Takis blew him a kiss. "I will cut off your tiny *pouts* and feed it to you, then I will cut your throat! You are nobody! You are not even Baboulas's real family. You are a cousin's cousin's cousin!" He clicked his fingers. "You are one of her dancing monkeys. That's what my uncle says. Dance, monkey, dance!"

Chapter 4

“THIS ISN’T FUNNY,” Donk said.

Takis looked from Marika to me, and back again. “I think it is funny. Raise your hand if you think it is funny.”

Marika and I raised our hands.

“It is so funny,” Takis said, “that I am taking a picture.” He snapped a picture with his phone, then tapped frantically on the screen with his thumbs. “Now I am sending it to Stavros and also Baby Dimitri. Nobody in Greece will have any doubts whether you are a boy or a little girl.”

Takis had trussed up Donk in women’s underwear and slapped enough cosmetics on his face that Donk looked like he had taken a wrong turn at his usual street corner. To add to the humiliation, he was cuffed to the shower rod.

“Wait a minute,” I said, eyes narrowing. “Is that my underwear?”

“Who else’s?” Takis shrugged, two palms up. “If I put Marika’s underwears on him it would be like throwing a stick into a tent.” Marika flicked his ear, but it was half-hearted. She was too busy enjoying The Donk Show.

“He’s wearing my thong!” I yelped.

Donk stopped swearing for a moment. “It’s okay, I manscape.”

Ugh. There was an image nobody needed.

“You shave or wax?” Takis said, suddenly interested.

“Who puts a razor near their balls? I go to this Bulgarian woman in Volos. She gets all excited when the Donk shows up for his waxing. I think she wants to play with my snake, if you know what I mean.”

We all stared at him. My thong wasn’t a big hiding place—it didn’t need to be—but it wasn’t toting much excess baggage right now.

“You’re still a teenager,” I said. “It’ll grow.”

Marika jerked her chin up. “No. No growing. The growing is over.”

The next day came on fast.

I trotted down the driveway to the mailbox. The black GMC coughed and rolled my way, electric windows humming. Lopez stuck his head out.

“Going somewhere?”

“No.”

“Because it looks to us like you’re going somewhere.”

I opened the mailbox and retrieved a lone flyer for a local plastic surgeon. I turned on one heel and hoofed it back to the house without another word.

“What’s that?” Takis said as I wandered past, on my way upstairs.

“A puppy,” I said.

He frowned, turned back to the television. Takis, Marika, and Donk were glued to *Ice Road Hitchhiking Housewives*. I jogged upstairs with the mail, dropped it on my parents’ bed with everything I’d retrieved yesterday. Their room was becoming a sort of sanctuary. They weren’t around but they were still here, and I found that comforting. One piece at a time, I flipped through the mail, hoping for something. What I got was junk. Dad and I paid everything online, so there were no bills.

Downstairs, the doorbell rang.

“Katerina,” Takis yelled, “there is someone at your door.”

I jogged back down to find Lopez and Bishop standing on the other side. They were unkempt, unshaven, and they smelled like sweaty balls.

“What do you want?” I said.

“We were thinking maybe we could come in, take a look around, see if maybe our guy has been here.”

“No.”

“No problem.” Lopez made a face. “We’ll come in while you’re out.”

“You can’t do that, you’re supposed to be the good guys!”

“Vice. Different rules.”

“Yo,” Bishop said. “No rules. Rules are for sissies.”

“No rules,” Lopez agreed. “Except the ones we make.”

I grabbed my phone, took a quick picture of the two cops, immediately fired the picture off to Stavros, Xander, and my Facebook feed. Call it insurance.

“What was that?” Lopez said, shifting from side to side. He didn’t look comfortable or happy.

“Souvenir.” I pocketed my phone. “Commemorative photo.”

“You can’t do that, dawg,” Bishop said. “Can she?”

“Already done,” I said. “Now go away.”

Lopez cleared his throat. “See the thing is ... we’ve been sitting in that car since last night. It’s a real nice car—”

“Real nice,” Bishop said.

“—But it doesn’t have the necessities. Bathroom, kitchen, that sort of thing. Think we could come in, use the facilities, maybe get a cup of coffee?”

I tilted my head. "Let me think about it for a moment. No." I shut the door in their faces. If they wanted coffee and a bathroom they'd have to find a gas station or a McDonald's, like normal derelicts.

Eye to the peephole, I watched them traipse back to the SUV. Bishop hoisted himself into the passenger side. Lopez stopped beside the mailbox to answer his phone. For a moment he stood there, picking at a spot on his neck while he talked, then he shoved the phone back in his pocket and bolted the rest of the way. The SUV was sturdy but it lurched as he heaved himself up behind the wheel. It roared away from the curb, leaving black streaks and a low-hanging cloud of freshly brewed pollution.

"Boy," I said, "they sure left in a hurry." A terrible thought cruised through my head. "Takis ... when you moved the body, where did you put it?"

He laughed. "In the trunk of his police captain's car."

"Oh crap," I said. "Oh crap, oh shit, oh hell!" I grabbed my hair with both hands. "Are you crazy? You stuffed a dead cop in his captain's trunk? What were you thinking?"

"Relax, it is the perfect hiding place."

"How?" I hissed. "How is that perfect?"

"A dead cop shows up in his boss's car? Wearing makeup? Looks like his boss is up to some kinky business. They will tie him up for weeks." He chuckled.

"But he didn't do it!"

Takis put on an innocent expression. "Do we know that? No, we don't know that. There was a dead man in your house. Anyone could have killed him. All we know is that it was not us. Maybe it was his boss. Maybe it was your neighbor. Maybe it was the mailman. We don't know. It is better this way. Those two *malakes* who were here were looking for a missing cop. Now they have found him, and on their territory, they will leave us alone." He made a face. "For now. That gives us time."

"For what?"

"To leave."

"I can't leave. I just got back." Plan A was to make a U-turn at Dad's safe, but that was before the dead cop. There was never any Plan B; the first one had seemed solid ... for quicksand.

"You came back for business, yes?" he said. "Take care of your business and let's go."

I went upstairs and took another look at the contents of Dad's safe. The money was All-American and real. US currency was nigh on impossible to duplicate; the treasury had years of practice foiling counterfeiters. The euro was a relative neophyte, still vulnerable to the world's underbelly.

I duplicated the list of names, dates, countries Dad visited, taped a copy to the underside of my underwear drawer. I snapped a picture of the original and sent it to a super-secret email account I had opened last night. When I had time, I'd cross-reference everything to dates I knew Dad was away, for my own curiosity mostly. I knew he was the one using these passports, but I wanted to know how many times he'd lied to me.

The next—and final—piece of business was to zip over to Dad's workplace. My whole life he'd worked for Winkler's Packing Goods, but I'd never been to his place of business. He was usually on the road, driving from one American city to another. When he wasn't behind the wheel he was home.

I drove there now, after telling my visitors to sit, stay. Takis followed anyway, staying at a discreet distance. No way would I ever admit it—not even under pain of torture, which was always a possibility in my family—but I was kind of glad he was there.

"Baboulas sends me to do a job, I do it," he had said when I first protested. "She told me to take care of you."

More like stalk me. Whether she didn't trust me, or she just wanted someone to watch my back, it was all—as Dad always said—the same shit. And for once I was glad.

Chapter 5

WINKLER'S PACKING Goods was a lie. The truth was a straight-out-of-the-1950s cement block building, hunkering in the middle of what looked like it used to be a used car dealership. Now the space was dedicated to the art of renting temporary toilets. The business called itself Shitz-U.

"It's a play on words," the business owner told me. "A mash up of shih tzu and U-Haul." He was a planet contained by a blue coverall force field. His head was a ham with a comb over and a ZZ Top beard.

"Very clever," I said, and he grunted. "How long have you been here?"

One of his hands went diving in that rat's nest on his face, searching, I presumed, for one of his chins to scratch. "Coming up on twenty years. You in the market for a rental?" He hooked a thick thumb at his stock, all of which looked gently—or worse—used.

"No, I was looking for packing supplies. I don't suppose you've ever heard of Winkler's Packing Goods? Someone gave me this address. But ..." I glanced over my shoulder. "... I think they must have been messing with me."

He shook his head, sucked saliva between graying teeth. "Nope, can't say I have. Before I was here, this was a Winnebago dealership. Never been a packing supply company here, far as I know."

I pulled out my phone, swiped to a recent photo of Dad. My heart hurt just looking at him. "Ever seen him before?"

Squint. "Nope."

Back into my cross-body bag the phone went. "Thanks anyway."

I left him to his temporary toilets and jogged back to my Jeep. Takis was parked a ways down the street in his rental van, trying not to look like a kiddie snatcher with a pocketful of candy. A car horn honked and a black GMC rolled up alongside my Jeep. I groaned.

"You got some freak following you," Lopez said.

"No kidding."

"Hey, just trying to help you out." He took his hands off the wheel, held them up. "Thought you should know."

"Gee, what a guy. That freak is with me."

"Boyfriend?"

I gave him an are-you-crazy look.

He nodded to the Shitz-U yard. "You in the market?"

"No." I yanked open the Jeep door, tossed my bag in.

Lopez took a long look at the row of portable toilets. “Something familiar about this place. It familiar to you?” he asked Bishop.

“Nah.”

“Who gives a crap what you think? I know there’s something about it ... Help me out,” he said to me.

“If you don’t give a crap you’re in the wrong place.”

He laughed, pointed his finger gun at me. “You’re funny. I know what it is now. It just came to me. This address is listed as your father’s place of employment. Thought he was a truck driver for a bubble wrap company?”

That made two of us. “Coincidence,” I said. “Two identical addresses in the same city could happen.”

“Think it’s a front for something else?” he said, tilting his head at the Shitz-U sign.

“Going home now.” I climbed into the Jeep, slammed the door shut after me.

“Hey!” He made a spinning motion with his hand. I let out an exasperated sigh and rolled down my window. “We found our guy, thought you’d like to know.”

“Great. Goodbye.”

“Yeah, I don’t think so. It’s more complicated than that,” he said, and the GMC sped away.

Complicated—an adjective that was getting a serious workout in my life lately. Now what? My father’s whole life was shaping up to be a lie. What did that make me?

“You are Baboulas’s only granddaughter. You better get used to people following you around, like paparazzi, and stalkers, and crazy people who want to steal locks of your hair and sell your underwear in vending machines,” Marika said when I got back to the house and told her about the cops.

Clearly she had mistaken me for somebody people cared about.

“I didn’t ask for this.”

“Who asks for it? Nobody, that is who. Only a crazy person would want to be wearing your shoes. They are nice shoes—” She eyed my current footwear of choice, sandals I’d snagged for a song at Nordstrom Rack five summers ago. “—But the life that goes with them ... *ay-yi-yi.*”

“You’re not making me feel better.”

“You want to shoot something? I bet that would help me.”

I dropped onto the couch, head on my knees, and took a deep breath. “Have you heard anything from Greece?” Like maybe Dad

magically appeared, suntanned and alive and sorry for not letting me know he was flying to the Seychelles for a few weeks. Or—I gulped—a ransom. Whoever was holding Dad captive had been silent so far. They had to want something, otherwise why snatch him?

“Dina has been visiting Baboulas, demanding to know when she’s going to strike against the family’s enemies.”

“What did Grandma do?”

“Nothing. What can she do? She cannot kill Dina just for being crazy.”

Dina was Dad’s ex-girlfriend—the one who preceded my mother. He had fled Greece abruptly without bothering to take Dina along ... or tell her he was leaving. She still didn’t realize they’d broken up. That he’d had a wife and child in between then and now was just a speed bump on true love’s path. Her home was shrine to Dad’s fabulosity. Dad was my dad and I loved him, but I drew the line at putting his face on throw pillows. My aunt—Dad’s youngest sibling, who had started life as Dad’s youngest brother, but was now his baby sister—said Dina rediscovered her virginity when she and Dad started dating. Before that her privates were like a train station. And Aunt Rita would know; she’d ridden that train, back when she was still a man.

The front door opened and Takis stuck his head in. “Time to go. Now.”

“Time to go,” Marika said in a singsong voice. “Now.”

Takis looked at her. The look was all dirty, and not in a sexy way. “Woman ...”

“Do not forget the luggage,” she said.

“Wait there,” he said, “I will need the boy to help me carry the biggest bag out. Maybe Katerina, too.”

Marika snorted. “Keep talking and I will spit in your food.”

Oh for crying out loud. I didn’t have time or the stomach for marital discord. It reminded me that I was single and my only prospect could throw my entire family away for life.

I grabbed my own bags, threw a backpack over one shoulder, double-checked that I had my phone, then parked myself on the porch until the others trailed out.

Takis tossed our luggage into the back of the van. He shoved Donk in and slammed the doors. Once again, I waved goodbye to my Jeep. Grandma had given me a bright yellow convertible VW Beetle to drive in Greece, but it wasn’t the same. The Jeep was mine. It had been mine when both my parents were alive and happy under the same roof.

“You leaving me again, Kat?” Reggie Tubbs called out from his front porch.

“Temporarily.”

He waved me closer. I didn’t want to, but I figured the best security you could have was a nosy neighbor.

“First there was that one clown who said he was a cop hanging around. Now you’ve got a couple of goons following you.”

I had a feeling he had dropped a question mark. I didn’t tell him the cop who wasn’t a cop was in fact a cop—a real dead cop. Reggie Tubbs still had ties to law enforcement, and not as a registered sex offender.

“They said they were vice.”

“That explains the goofy outfits. You see what detectives wear these days? In my days they wore suits and ties. When I was a kid they even wore hats. You never see men in hats these days unless they’re those baseball caps, and even then they wear ‘em wrong.” He stared pointedly at Donk, who had jumped back out of the van. Donk noticed us looking, grabbed his crotch, and leered. “What is that?” Reggie wanted to know.

“The nephew of my grandmother’s colleague. Calls himself Donk.”

“Didn’t know you had a grandmother.”

“She’s Greek.”

He got an interested gleam in his eye. “Single?”

“Widow.”

“She like American men?”

“She’s your age, and she’s spent a lot of one-on-one time with gravity.”

His face fell. “Why didn’t you say so?”

I pulled out a piece of paper, scribbled my email address and cell number, and reached up to give it to him. “Can you let me know if you see anyone else snooping around?”

“You in some kind of trouble?”

“Always.”

“You want to come inside, talk to Judge Junior about it?”

“Never.”

“Worth a try,” he said. He held up the paper. “I’ll let you know.”

I thanked him and trotted back to the waiting van. Then we hit the road, headed for the airport.

We’d been driving a while when Takis glanced over at me. Donk had called shotgun but Marika had clipped his ear and sent him scrambling for the back. Then Marika had hopped in beside the kid. Which left me two choices: ride with the bags or ride with Takis. The passenger seat, at least, had a seatbelt and direct access to the air

conditioning.

“What are you looking at?”

I kept glancing in the side mirror to see if we were being followed by Vanilla Ice and Mexican Tony Soprano.

“She’s looking at the Donk—who do you think? Even the old ladies love the Donk.”

“Heh.” Takis chuckled. “He is calling you old, Katerina.”

There was a boyish squeal from the back. Marika cackled.

“Just being a good sidekick,” she said. “My mother had a good trick to keep us in line. She would sit her hand on our shoulder—very loving—then she would yank on those fine hairs on the nape. Nobody knew how we suffered.”

Thinking about it made my eyes water. “I’m checking to see if we’ve got a tail.”

“Those two *malakes* in the GMC?” Takis said. “They are back there. Way back.”

Takis was good—I hadn’t spotted them. But then he’d have to be if he worked for Grandma. My cousin’s cousin’s cousin was fifty percent moron, fifty percent stone-cold henchman. I wasn’t sure which scared me more.

“Can they stop us leaving?” I asked him.

“Maybe.”

The thing about Portland traffic is that it’s borderline civilized. Even during rush hour people still remember things like manners. That didn’t make me hate the inevitable slow crawl toward the airport any less. The air was hazy with a mixture of summer’s dog breath and disappointment. Every so often a plane swooped low over the highway, like we were all take-out meals in metal boxes, waiting for pickup.

Takis was grinding his teeth. “If we were in Athens we would be there by now.”

I gawped at him. “Athens? Athens, Greece?”

“Where else is Athens?”

I couldn’t be bothered explaining that we had an Athens right here in the US, along with a Rome, and our very own Paris down in Texas. “Athens traffic is hell on earth.” If hand-to-hand combat was your thing, the streets of Greece’s capital city were for you. No discernible rules. Hit-and-run was a fact of life. Athens was the jungleiest of the concrete jungles.

“It is civilized,” Takis said. “In Athens nobody cares if you get out and punch a bad driver or drive up on the sidewalk.”

“We’re on the highway. There’s no sidewalk.”

“What is that then?” He nodded to a grassy area running alongside us.

“A field. And I’m pretty sure the airport owns it, so if you zip over there you’ll wind up in Homeland Security custody—again.”

“This country makes no sense,” he muttered.

That’s when I remembered the guns he’d stashed in my house. When I asked about them he shrugged. “I put them in your attic.”

“You hid illegal weapons in my house?”

“Attic.”

“The attic is part of the house.”

“Then yes, I hid illegal weapons in your house. What if you need them?”

“Jesus,” I said, flopping back in the seat. I needed smelling salts. I needed a cool cloth to lie across my forehead. I needed one of those lamps with a genie inside. I had wishes to make, damn it.

The van jerked forward. We were on the move again. Soon we were cruising past the terminal. I pointed to where people were rolling, dragging, hauling bags through big revolving doors. Shuttles came and went. Cops cars paid homage to the idea of parallel parking by not giving a damn about things like lines or breathing room.

“You do know that’s the terminal, right?”

“I know,” Takis said.

“Is this one of those man things, where you pretend you know but don’t?”

Marika chuckled behind me. “It is like she knows you.”

“*Gamo ti putana*,” Takis muttered. “I know where I am going. Who is driving, eh? Who is driving?”

“Do you need to ask for directions?” I said.

“What for? I know where I am going.”

“The terminal ...”

“Back that way, I know. But we are not going to the terminal, smarty-pants.”

I sobered up. “Where are we going?”

“Shaddap and you will see.” He glanced in the side mirror. The van was creeping now, thanks to the glut of airport traffic. “The two *malakes* are still there. If they wanted to stop us they could have done it by now,” he told me.

“What do they want?”

“Let me consult the coffee cup and I will tell you ... How the fuck do I know?”

Marika reached out and touched him—hard.

“*Gamo tin Panayia mou!*”

Threatening to sexually ravage the Virgin Mary won him another slap. Finally, he hunched over the steering wheel out of his wife’s reach and concentrated on driving. Soon we broke through the traffic by turning onto a right-bound road. Takis steered us past a chain link

fence, to where a flock of smaller planes waited. Private planes, smaller commercial birds, Lear jets. My gut flip-flopped as I scanned the horizon for the one plane that wasn't supposed to be here. There it was ... white, gleaming, smug.

I blew out a big sigh. Family. "Why is Grandma's plane here?"

Takis didn't say a word until he'd stopped. "Baboulas insisted."

"I insisted first—commercial flights, all the way."

"She insisted louder and with a gun."

"I have guns." That he had left in my attic.

"She pays me and gives my family a place to live."

Marika nodded behind us. "Also, she makes excellent baklava."

I couldn't argue with that part, but the rest was up for grabs. "I'm not getting on that plane."

"Okay." He shrugged. "The police can have you, then. I do not think they will just let you get on a plane."

"But I didn't do anything!"

"This is the police. They don't have to know anything, they just have to think it."

"Wait," I said. "I'm thinking."

"Think fast or they will be here."

"Who flew the plane here?"

"Xander."

If Detective Melas gave me butterflies, Xander, Grandma's perpetually silent bodyguard, gave me hot flashes. I kind of got the feeling he had that effect on every woman who swung straight, and the percentage of the male population that didn't.

"Xander can fly?"

"Xander can do many things," he said darkly.

The plane door opened, revealing a narrow staircase, and down came Xander, looking like he was one of the Olympian gods stepping off the mountain for the day. He moved like a man with a mission—and apparently that mission was me. He covered the ground between us in no time and yanked the passenger door open. He reached in, pulled me out, threw me over his shoulder.

"Argh! Not fair!"

"I warned you," Takis called out from the driver's side.

"No, you didn't."

"I meant to. What is it they say?" I heard the opening and closing of the van's back doors as Takis retrieved our luggage. "The thought is what counts."

"They're talking about gifts when they say that." My face bobbed against Xander's very taut, very muscular butt as he carried me up the plane's stairs. The others were following. "Like when someone gives you socks but you don't have feet."

“What kind of asshole gives socks to someone without feet?” Takis said.

Xander dumped me in what was becoming my usual seat on Grandma’s jet. Takis splintered off, taking his place in the cockpit. Marika made herself comfortable in the window seat beside me. The seats were rich chocolate leather. The carpets were some kind of natural fibers; you’d have to work hard to skin your knees on it. The accents were a touch too golden for anyone who wasn’t into rap. At the back of the plane someone had installed an icon box, complete with the Virgin Mary, Jesus, and a handful of saints, presumably for insurance purposes.

“This is what the Donk is talking about,” Donk said, embracing the weirdness that is referring to yourself in third person. “My uncle doesn’t have a plane. Why does your family have a plane?”

“Our family is better than your family,” Takis called out from the cockpit. “But hey, you get free shoes.”

The engines began to purr.

“*Fack* you,” Donk said, “I have to steal my shoes like everybody else.”

Xander planted himself in the seat across from me. He was wearing dark gray suit pants, a plain white button-down shirt, and a tie that said he wasn’t a fan of clashing colors, complimentary colors, or colors. He was tall, he was dark-haired and bronze-skinned, and he had the kind of body that was probably carved in a gym but looked like he’d come by it the old-fashioned way: slinging boulders and digging trenches. What I couldn’t see from here, with all the clothes in the way, was the waterfall of scars that flowed down his back and stopped someplace below his belt. How he’d scored those I didn’t know ... and would never ask. Scars like that aren’t the result of good times.

“Bouncer or businessman?” I said. He snorted, leaned his head back on the squishy leather headrest, and closed his eyes. Must have been tired if he’d flown all the way from Greece in one clean shot. The distance between coasts tacked another five hours to the trip. He folded his arms; they had a lot of chest territory to cover.

“Fasten your seat belts,” Takis called out.

I leaned over Marika, squinted out the window. Lopez and Bishop were leaning against their hulking SUV, arms folded, watching. I wiggled my fingers at them. So long, suckers.

As Takis rolled toward the runway, I saw them hoist themselves back into the SUV. Hopefully that would be the last I’d see of Portland’s not-so-finest.

As soon as Takis gave us the all clear I shrugged on my hoodie, pulled the hood over my face, and hoped no gun-toting morons would mistake me for an urban teenager. I figured I was safe-ish in the family plane; Greeks don't usually care about the color of your skin. They're more worried about the important stuff, like, *Do you want seconds?* and *When are you going to have more children?*

I bit my nails when we landed at JFK to refuel and do immigration the legal way, for a change. The Family had ways in and out of the country that weren't entirely—or at all—kosher, but I had insisted on doing this right. The Portland Bureau of Police hadn't issued a ... whatever it is they issued to stop suspected criminals and persons of interest from fleeing the country. Which made me even more leery of Lopez and Bishop. They had badges, but something about them made me think of vegetables painstakingly concealed in a toddler's favorite foods. If Dad and I were so interesting to them, why were they letting me run?

While we were on the ground, I fired a text message at Melas, letting him know I was on my way back, and did he want to have a coffee sometime. Coffee is good. Coffee is for friends. Coffee says, I like your company, but if I wanted to see you naked I would have suggested dinner.

Paperwork stamped, plane refueled, we rolled out of New York and kissed American soil goodbye, Greek-style, on both cheeks. Now, there was no knowing when I'd be back—if I could come back. Probably I was a fugitive on the run now. I should probably update my Facebook status to let people know that my life was at least a hundred-percent more exciting these days. But now that I was 'friends' with most of my family, and at least one drug dealer, most of the replies would be something like, "We're fugitives, too. Opa!"

Twenty hours later, Takis said, "Get out. We are here."

Here was Volos, Greece, on the Family's private airstrip. To look at Grandma you wouldn't know she had anything. As it turned out, out she had everything except a fancy wardrobe and a hairstylist.

We stepped out of air-conditioned comfort into a convection oven. The plant life was apathetic; the ground was parched, and somewhere close by, Roma people were hollering about watermelons for sale. Suddenly, I really wanted a watermelon. Takis and Xander unloaded the plane and carried our luggage to an SUV from Grandma's fleet. The family compound had a massive garage that housed everything from limos to my VW Beetle. Xander owned two vehicles of his own: a new motorcycle that had replaced the old one, after it had an accident

with a Molotov cocktail; and a black European bullet he kept constantly tuned to the Shitty Music Station. We piled into the SUV and his hand moved toward the console.

“Don’t even think about it,” I said as he rolled us across the gravel and grass. “Or I’ll make baseless threats and give you dirty, ineffectual looks.”

In the rearview mirror, his mouth twitched. Smile or grimace, it was hard to say.

I checked my phone. Nothing from Melas. Guess he didn’t want coffee, or he’d exceeded his lifetime quota.

Marika was holding up her phone to the window, angling it this way and that. “Trying to get a good signal,” she said. Then she made a satisfied sound. “There. A hundred text messages. Who sends a hundred text messages?” She pushed her weight across Donk, who was strapped between us in the backseat, and poked Takis. “Our children, that is who. Apparently they have tied up Stavros in an undisclosed location and they are demanding ransom.”

“What do they want?” he said.

“Bigger allowances.”

“I allow them to live. What more do they want?”

Marika flopped back in the leather seat. It made a farting noise.

“Smartest thing you have said all day,” Takis said.

She ignored him. “I will poison his food later,” she said to me. “I bet they have tied up Stavros in the bathroom. That is where they always put their hostages.”

“They do it a lot?” I asked her, slightly horrified.

“Only when they want something.” One finger scrolled through messages, then she gasped, clutched her chest. “My Virgin Mary! Detective Melas has been shot!”

“What do you expect, he is the police,” Takis said. “Bullets go with the job.”

My head went spongy. All the smart stuff oozed out, leaving behind a cold sludge. Inside my chest my heart came to a standstill. I didn’t have the wherewithal to poke it. “Shot?” Was he alive? Dead? Why wasn’t anyone saying?

“Shot,” she said, “With a gun. You know: bang bang.”

“She knows what a gun is, you idiot,” Takis said.

“Keep it up,” Marika said, “and no more *tiganites* for you. Not from my kitchen.”

Subdued by the prospect of no more French fries, Takis yanked his own phone off his belt and began tapping frantically on the screen.

“Why not call them, eh?” Marika said.

Takis didn’t look up from his phone. “Because if Melas was shot he is at the hospital, and if he is at the hospital then he is probably in the

ICU, and if he is in the ICU then you cannot have your phone on in there.”

“Shot,” I whimpered again.

Marika reached over to pat me on the shoulder, slapping Donk’s head on the way past.

“You will live,” Marika told him when he complained.

“You try being squeezed in a back seat between a whale and a hot old lady.”

“There is nothing wrong with Katerina’s weight,” Marika said. To me: “Melas will be fine, you will see.”

Takis couldn’t help himself. “Unless he dies ... or he is dead already.”

The SUV was roomy for normal activities like sitting the right way up and possibly having cramped sex, but there was no way I could curl into the fetal position and rock without banging into Xander’s seat.

“Oh Jesus,” I might have said. Xander’s expression was unreadable in the rearview mirror. He stepped on the gas until we were shooting away from the airfield. We sped past the road I knew would take us back up the mountain to Makria and the family compound, hurtling us into the heart of Volos, where the wild things were the other drivers on the road. The SUV threaded through the streets, dodging slow-moving donkeys and rusty Romany pickup trucks, until it lurched to a stop in the ambulance bay of the Volos hospital.

A head poked out from between the automatic doors. The security guy opened his mouth to say something, then shook his head. “Oh, it’s you. Never mind.” Then he scuttled back inside.

“Come here a lot?” I asked Xander. Of course he did. The Family probably had all-access passes.

We bundled into the hospital, minus Xander, who went to park. At the reception desk Takis leaned hard on the counter and asked for Melas’s whereabouts. Words were exchanged. Bribes were made ... and accepted. Moments later, after Takis had bought a coffee, we were riding the elevator to the top floor.

Donk slouched along behind us. “Why do I have to be here? I hate hospitals. Do they have hot nurses in high heels?”

“Haven’t you been in a hospital before?” I said to him.

“Nobody in my family gets shot.”

“Sure they do,” Takis said over his shoulder. “Nobody tells you, that is all. Take a look at your uncle’s *kolos* sometime.”

“*Gkangksta*,” Donk said, looking impressed.

The elevator doors opened on a scene straight out of the movies. Henchmen were stationed alongside the ICU’s double doors, making sure no one was getting in or out unless they had a reason.

I knew the henchmen, by sight if not name. They were Grandma's.

"No cops?" I said to no one in particular.

Takis shrugged. "The country cannot afford to put their own men here. It means taking them off the street. So Baboulas is in charge of security while Melas is here."

I looked at him. "And you know this ...?"

He held up his phone. "Magic." He pressed the OFF button, clipped it back on his belt.

The ICU was quiet, save for the blips and beeps and the soft scuff of shoes on linoleum. Greek nurses were skilled in the arts of magazine flipping, gossiping, and collecting the *fakelaki* (little envelopes) that swapped hands if you wanted professional medical care. Greece had nationalized medicine, but the death-gurgling economy meant there was a chronic shortage of giving a rat's ass. If you didn't pack family for a hospital stay in Greece, and you were low on cash, you were out of luck if you needed any actual nursing—and in some places, doctoring.

Melas's room was across from the nurses' station. Again, the private security gave it away. Kissing and hugging happened—quietly—then we were free to file into the room. My eyes cut immediately to the figure on the bed, and my heart squeezed. I was used to Melas, big and bad and tasty, in his uniform or in plain clothes. Now he looked nothing like Melas.

Because the man in the bed was not Detective Nikos Melas.

Chapter 6

I OPENED MY MOUTH. A hand clamped it shut. My eyes swiveled to take in the dour mug of Kyria (Mrs.) Mela, the detective's mother. Kyria Mela was one of Grandma's former employees, a torturer by trade. Her bobbed hair was helmet stiff and witch black. She liked me or she didn't like me, depending on whether or not she thought I wanted to seduce her son and drag him to the dark side at any given moment. And yeah, she scared the bejeezus out of me, especially now that I knew she kept a box of implements handy, in case someone needed emergency torturing. The detective didn't know about his mother's past, and I wasn't going to enlighten him any time ever.

"Walk with me," Grandma said from behind me. Grandma was half a head shorter than me and shaped like an egg with waist-length boobs. Her eyes were dark, her cheekbones could slice throats, and she kept her iron-tinged hair hostage in a tight bun at her nape.

The rest of the room came into focus in pieces: the mummy in the bed; his not-really-his mother; Grandma; a handful of other people I didn't know, but who I'd seen in the photographs on Kyria Mela's table in her entertaining room.

Melas's family was here, and so was a good chunk of mine, but where was he?

Grandma hooked her arm through mine, steered me back into the hallway, into the elevator, and outside. Xander pulled up in the SUV and jumped out to open our doors.

I slid into the back and buckled up. "You asked me to walk with you, not ride."

"Did I ask? No," Grandma said.

Away we sped. In silence. Lots of silence. Which was a blessing if you knew about Xander's taste in music. He was a big fan of Rembetika, or Greek folk music. It's the bastard offspring of a male cat being neutered without anesthetic and raggedy toenails down a chalkboard. And Rembetika's lyrics were suspect, too. *The squid was too big so I left the fish to drown* was one I'd heard in Xander's other ride. And *I loved her but she left me for a donkey's cheese*.

"Where are we going?"

"You will see," Grandma said.

I leaned forward. "Are you going to kill me?"

Xander shook with barely repressed laughter. Grandma elbowed him, cackling.

“She still thinks we are going to kill her. Relax, Katerina, nobody is going to kill you. If they do, the revenge will be terrible, I promise.”

“That’s reassuring.”

“How was America?”

“American.”

“Did Takis take care of your problem?”

“You already know he did.”

True,” she said, “but better to hear about it from you. Takis ... he exaggerates.”

I snorted. “He gave the dead guy a makeover and stuck him in a tree house. Then Marika told him to move it, so he put the guy in his boss’s car trunk. His boss is a police captain.”

Her head whipped around. Her eyes were beady and bright, and probably she could read minds. “That is the story he told me. I thought he was being dramatic so he would seem more interesting.”

“True story. And the Portland police really, really want to talk to me.”

“What for?”

I shrugged. “They came over looking for their guy.”

“Takis told me that, too. But why did they come to your home?”

I told her what little they had told me, minus Lopez’s bits of winning humor. She made a sniffing sound. “Sounds like a setup to me. Where are they now, these two policemen?”

“Last time I saw them, PDX—Portland’s airport.”

Xander was steering us up Mount Pelion now, toward Makria. The roads were narrow and winding and often filled with livestock. Today they were clear.

Grandma glanced in the side mirror. “Is one skinny and looks like a black man dropped in bleach, and the other a fatty with a pumpkin head?”

Uh oh. “Yes. Why?”

“Look behind you.”

I swung around the backseat and stared. Sure enough, Lopez and Bishop were tootling along behind the SUV, stuffed into a dark blue Fiat.

“What?” I face-palmed. “How is this possible?”

“Technology,” Grandma said darkly. “It is a big pain in my *kolos*. Xander, pull over. You know what to do.”

“What?” I squeaked as we rolled to a stop. “You can’t kill them!” I stopped, thought about it. “Okay, you can—and probably will—but don’t. They’re American cops!”

Xander parked on what only a drunk optimist could have called a shoulder. The Fiat pulled up alongside us, potentially constipating traffic up and down the mountain, and conveniently blocking Xander’s

door. Bishop rolled down the passenger window so Lopez could lean over him. He indicated for me to roll down my window, so I did. But I made out like it was killing me.

"Wow," Lopez said. "What a coincidence." He glanced at his partner. "Isn't this a coincidence?"

"Yo, total coincidence," Bishop said. "Like, whoa!"

"What are you doing here?" Lopez clicked his fingers. "Let me guess. Working on that tan." He peered past me. "Who's the old lady? Your grandma?" His fingers wiggled. "Hi, old lady."

Oh boy.

Grandma arched a brow with the skill of a super villain. "Did the pumpkin just call me an old lady?"

"A-yup," I said, in my best hillbilly accent.

"It is one thing to be old. It is another to be called that by a gourd. I would like to make *Tzak o' lantern* of his head. Stick a candle up his neck and watch his eyes shine."

"That's not a metaphor, is it?"

"I do not joke about turning people into decoration for *Apokries*."

Apokries. It's Greek Halloween ... in February. The name is literally a farewell to meat as Lent sweeps in and yanks the lamb chop out of every Greek mouth. Apokries lasts for three weeks and has nothing to do with the occult, but everyone still dresses up like a slutty nurse or a slutty schoolgirl or a slutty slut, and knocks on doors for free cakes and candy. At the end of the three weeks there's a big carnival, where everyone does the usual carnival stuff, before setting aside fun until Easter.

I gulped.

"Who's the big guy?" Lopez scanned Xander up and down. "The old lady's boy toy?"

Oof. I wanted to tell him to quit now while he still had a head, but Lopez didn't seem like the guy who excelled at taking orders—especially not from a woman.

"Boy toy? What is *boy toy*?" Grandma wanted to know. So I told her. "On the one hand I want to laugh," she said. She made a face. "On the other hand I want to laugh, too."

There was a gut-rumbling commotion behind us as a bus wheezed to a stop. The driver honked and showed the American cops the other, lesser-known, one-fingered Greek flag.

Lopez shot a glance in his rearview mirror. "Shit. Can't the fucker go around me?"

No. No, he couldn't. After polluting the air with half a dozen angry honks and the dull groans of a motor crawling to death's door, the driver climbed down out of his bus and stormed over to the Fiat's driver's side window. Insults poured out of his mouth, thick and bitter.

It was the usual blend of sexual perversions targeting everything Lopez had ever loved or held sacred, using a donkey's deformed penis. I'd never looked at a donkey closely enough to know if they were all built that way, or just this particular one.

Grandma was howling in the front seat, tears streaming along the previously dry riverbeds time had carved in her face. Lopez didn't have clue one what the driver was saying, only that he was saying it loudly and punctuated with spit. The fat cop launched into his own diatribe about the bus driver's mother and her issues with her weight and promiscuity.

Brakes complaining and squealing about the pitch of the road, another bus rounded the corner—in the downward-bound lane this time. The driver performed a miracle, the rolling tin can screeching to a stop a split second before it concertinaed the Fiat. Now Lopez and Bishop were trapped, and they had two screaming Greek bus drivers threatening to violate their mothers with a variety of domesticated and wild animals. Gods were involved. Things were getting apocalyptic. Then a van pulled up behind us, intending to overtake the idiots via the wannabe shoulder.

I stuck my head between the two front seats. "Probably we should go now," I told Xander and Grandma.

"Katerina is right," Grandma said. "We should leave these two *vlakas* to their fate."

Xander inched forward, miraculously working the SUV out of the tangle without so much as a scratch. The van that surged into its place wasn't so lucky. Now that it was wedged between a mountain, two buses, and a Fiat, the driver couldn't do a thing except roll down his window and add his voice to the unholy chorus.

"Crap," I said, rolling up my window.

"They will be fine ... or fine-ish," Grandma said. "Unless they decide to become a problem. Then it will be pumpkin carving time. It has been a long time since I carved a pumpkin."

Before long, Xander was easing the SUV down the dirt road that led to the compound. The way was thick with trees—olives and other assorted fruits. Somewhere nearby was the family farm that kept the compound supplied with meat and eggs. It was like the North Pole: I knew it existed but I'd never seen it. The trees fell away, revealing the family compound and the stone wall that surrounded the grounds. The main building was two-story, white, and looked more like a swanky hotel than anyone's home. But home it was to most of the Makris family and a handful of its employees. Out front was the massive garage that housed all the vehicles. A couple of the cousins were out there now, soaping down the limo. As always, the guardhouse was manned. When the guard saw us approaching he pushed a button to

open the towering iron gates and came out to greet us.

"Hey, Katerina is back!" he said cheerfully. "How was America?"

"American."

"I heard there was a dead cross-dresser in your house."

"Policeman."

He winced.

Xander parked between the fountain and the archway that lead to the compound's courtyard. As soon as I got out, the perfume from Grandma's gardens shoved its fingers up my nose. Grandma did all of the compound's gardening, and she did it while she was doing Godmother stuff, tending to business and dealing with People with Problems. While she was temporarily incarcerated, I had taken over (not my choice) and dealt with matters that had required some delicacy. Never again would I mention souvlaki to a pair of sheep lovers.

Through the archway we went, where we were greeted by a passel of dogs and a lop-eared goat that was unofficially mine. I'd discovered it eating the curtains in Grandma's guest room. Grandma had wanted to cook the goat but I'd gone to bat for its life. Now it hung around the compound, nibbling pool noodles and drinking out of the fountains. My goat was still nameless. I was waiting on a goat-naming epiphany.

Grandma didn't live in the compound's main building. Her residence was a doglegged dump crouching in the middle of the courtyard, hoping someone would put it out of its misery and swing a wrecking ball in its face. Her crack house was a family heirloom, passed from eldest child to eldest child. Dad was the eldest of three, which meant one day this heap would be mine. I was hoping for a loophole I could jump through without hanging myself.

Today, wherever we were headed, Grandma's house wasn't it. We passed the shack, the large swimming pool, two fountains, a dozen Makris children, and the conservatory. Xander held open one of the doors leading into the main building. Inside the floors were a dark, luxurious marble and the walls were a soothing cream. It reeked of money. Grandma's shack smelled more like dry rot.

We stopped in front of a broom closet. Grandma turned to me.

"You have heard about the dungeon, yes?"

There was no denying it. Grandma *knew* I knew about the dungeon.

"Yes?" I squeaked.

She pushed me into the broom closet and followed me in. Xander stayed outside, closed the door. Maybe it was my imagination, but I think he winked at me.

It's possible we had a secret, Xander and I. After an encounter that

was one part sexual, two parts deadly, I'd discovered he posed occasionally as a member of the National Intelligence Service, Greece's CIA. Whether he was faking it or not, I wasn't sure. Whether Grandma knew the answer to the Xander riddle wasn't something I knew, either. And I wasn't about to give her a heads up. I didn't know any of the players well enough to jump into the game. What if I doomed him to certain death? What if I doomed her to life in prison? She didn't have much that much life left. Grandma was sick. Unless I thought Grandma was in trouble, I was keeping my lips zipped about the Xander situation.

Grandma shuffled 180 degrees, then pushed against the wall. It swung open, revealing nothing because we were standing in almost complete darkness.

"Come," Grandma said, and took a step forward. By the way she suddenly shrank by several inches, I knew there were steps—I just couldn't see them yet. I was suddenly worried about Grandma's hips. What if she fell and shattered them? Old people were known for the fragility of their hips. And what about me? I was in my late twenties now—weren't my bones starting to thin already? My bladder was already showing signs of tightening its belt and moving to a smaller container.

Then she vanished, inch by smooth inch.

"Come on, Katerina." Her voice was moving away. So I took a step down ... and was instantly transported away. I jumped back up onto solid ground.

Yikes!

Further down, Grandma cackled in the dark. "It is an escalator. Do they not have escalators in America?"

"They have them, but they keep them in light places. They're funny like that."

"You have a point. Let there be light."

Then just like that, the light ... I wouldn't say *flooded* in ... let's go with *trickled*. Light trickled in, all of it emanating from a long tube on the wall that had seen better days ... during the cold war.

My jaw dropped.

Grandma glanced back up at me. "You look like you have seen a ghost."

"Did you just do ... magic?"

"No. It takes a few seconds to kick on. The bulb is old."

"Hmm ..." I wasn't completely convinced Grandma couldn't work some kind of freaky Greek folk magic. If I turned into a frog I'd know where to point my webbed finger.

Now that the lower space was filled with bluish light, and I was convinced there weren't crocodiles at the bottom (not that I'm scared

of crocodiles—I'm not. But they're crocodiles; everyone should have a healthy respect for something that can eat them) I stepped onto the escalator and began to descend. It wasn't far. I could have fallen without breaking a hip. At the end of the escalator a tunnel had been burrowed into the ground. It was narrow and gloomy, like pretty much every tunnel ever, and stopped at a metal door with a keypad above the handle.

I raised an eyebrow. "Is Bilbo Baggins home?"

"Who?"

So Grandma wasn't versed in the ways of Tolkien. Funny, the way Dad talked about her you'd think Sauron was modeled on Grandma.

"Never mind. No retinal scan?"

"I am thinking about it."

Before she had a chance to press the code into the pad, the door swung open, and a beehive-topped body appeared.

"Katerina, my love!"

I was instantly enveloped in a cloud of Poison, my Aunt Rita's signature fragrance. Aunt Rita was all woman, even if her original parts had been male. She had big hair—today, at least—long legs, boyish hips, and a rack that could hold a half dozen wine glasses. She had wiggled it all into a short swingy dress straight out of the 60s. If the geometric print didn't blind you, the white go-go boots would. Only a few weeks had passed since I'd met my Aunt Rita (Dad took secrecy to a new level when it came to his family), but already she was beginning to feel like home. We hugged and jumped around, and then she grabbed me by the hand and tugged me through the open door.

"Come see our dungeon," she said.

And just like that I was standing in a dungeon straight out of classic fiction from the 1800s. Gray stone ominously stained. Shackles. Lots of bars and iron separating the cells. All that was missing was the straw on the floor. When I mentioned this, Grandma and Aunt Rita looked at me like I was three udders short of a dairy cow.

"This is Greece," my aunt said. "We don't have enough grain to waste straw on prisoners."

"I just thought there would be straw. Or hay."

"No. No hay." Aunt Rita pinched my cheek. "You are adorable." She shimmied over to a door in the far wall—this one worn iron with a peephole—and held it open for us. Male voices filtered through. They were arguing about ... spelling?

"It is war in here," Aunt Rita said darkly.

The raised voices dropped dead when Grandma swooped through. My aunt tilted her head and I followed.

I swung my gaze around the new location, which looked in no way

affiliated with the other one. This had a pleasant sort of galley kitchen with a narrow hall radiating down the right-hand wall, into which several doors with slots about eye-height had been cut. The doors were steel, but other than that it all looked quite homey. No one was screaming, bleeding, or otherwise suffering aloud.

In the kitchen sat a table, red and white checked tablecloth thrown over it. Plastic, of course. Greece was addicted to plastic tablecloths. In the center of the table was a Scrabble board, Greek words zigzagged across its cardboard face. The table was set for three players, two of whom were at the table, mid-battle over the correct spelling of some obscure word. My Greek was decent, but it wasn't Scrabble-level.

I gawked at Detective Melas, who was working his way up to an eleven with the addition of stubble to his look. He was in cargo shorts and a sleeveless shirt that was somehow affecting my breathing. He didn't appear injured, just pissed that he was losing at Scrabble to an Ancient Greek relic. Papou, Grandma's advisor, was his opponent. Aunt Rita, I guessed, was the third point on this triangle.

"You're supposed to be in the hospital," I said to Melas.

He smiled up at me. "Supposed to be in a grave, but I got lucky." He looked me up and down. "You look good."

"I doubt that," I muttered. Suddenly I was filled with regret. Regret that I hadn't changed out of my baggy old jeans and T-shirt. Regret that I hadn't found time to shower and coax a brush through my hair. Regret that I had a ton of makeup, but the only one wearing it was a dead cop back in Portland. "Who's in the hospital bed?"

"Long story."

"Make it short."

His smile sprawled, made itself at home. "One of your cousins."

"That's a heck of an ending. I can't wait to hear the beginning."

"It started with a stakeout."

"So I gathered. Were you really shot?"

"Yes."

"Where?"

That grin evolved into one of those smirks that's gotten many a woman into trouble. If he kept it up, I'd wake up in a hotel room, looking for my missing underwear, wondering whether the tattoo of his name on my butt was the real deal or temporary.

"Want me to show you?"

Papou snorted. "*Malaka*, the bullet grazed your side. We put a plaster on your ouchie and now you are fine."

Melas laughed. "You heard the man. But it's not just any plaster, it's Mickey Mouse."

"Mickey Mouse, my *kolos*," Papou muttered.

Another voice joined the conversation, one that wafted down the hall from the cells. "We got a visitor? Oh boy, we got a visitor."

"No," Papou yelled. "No visitor."

The voice snorted. "Sounds like a visitor to me. I know all your stinking Makris voices, but I don't know this one. Ergo, visitor. Hey, visitor. Down here."

Papou eyed me. "Ignore him if you know what is good for you."

Did I? The jury was still out. Greece had already led me off the good-for-me path and dragged me into the weeds.

I shrugged, trotted down the hall, until the voice said, "Well, look at you."

"I just got off a plane."

"You couldn't fix your hair before you came to visit me?"

"I didn't come to visit you."

Papou, Grandma, and Aunt Rita laughed. "She got you there, you old *poutsokleftis*," Papou said. Greek insults cracked me up; they made 'dick thief' sound almost like a term of endearment.

"Who are you?" I said.

"Eh, who remembers?" He moved away from the door. "I forget."

I tentatively peered through the rectangular slot, getting my first look at what was considered a dungeon cell around here. Marble floor. Walls white enough you could lick them and feel good about not contracting some rare form of Greek Ebola. The bed was a single but the mattress and pillows looked plump and the linens high thread count. There was a fully loaded bookcase, a desk and chair, and a poster of Anna Vissi tacked to the wall.

(Anna Vissi is what happens when you throw Madonna, Jennifer Lopez, and talent into a blender.) I raised an eyebrow, shot an inquiring glance at my family (and Melas) bunched around the table. "Marble floors? Really?"

"Easier to clean blood off marble than concrete," Aunt Rita said, rearranging the letters in front of her. "All you have to do is wipe. With concrete you have to scrub if it dries. Who has time for that?"

That made a disturbing amount of sense.

Back to the slot. The prisoner was sitting on the bed, gripping a book in one hand, glasses poised on the end of his fist-sized nose. He had a monobrow that didn't so much as dip in the middle; it was what it was and didn't pretend it had any aspirations toward division. His eyes were dark and hooded. I pegged his age as north of sixty, south of a hundred. Something about him was oddly familiar.

"Who is he?"

"Makria's only homeless person," Grandma said.

"So you put him in the dungeon?"

"He can leave any time."

"It's true," the man said. "Any time."

"Why don't you give him a job or something? Maybe you need someone to ... I don't know ... clean something."

He made an offended noise. "Why do I want to work for a living when I can stay here for free?"

"You see what I am dealing with?" Grandma said. "A bum."

More snorting. "If I am such a bum, why are you always down here, talking to me, eh?"

"I feel sorry for you," Grandma said. "My conversation is charity."

"What about the baklava?"

"I made too much. It would be a sin to throw it away."

He shifted his attention back to me. "You look like a Makris. I thought I knew them all."

"Katerina Makris," I said. "With an S."

"Ah, you are the long-lost granddaughter."

"You're not lost if you know exactly where you are."

He laughed. "Come talk to me sometime, eh? And bring *loukoumi*—the rose one."

I made polite, vague noises, but didn't make any promises I wasn't sure I could keep. This trip to the dungeon might be a one-time deal.

"Wait," I said, wandering back to the Scrabble game that was in danger of getting deadly. It's never a stellar idea to play board games with anyone carrying—concealed or otherwise. "Are you ... hiding out in Grandma's dungeon?" I asked Melas.

The detective flashed me a grin. I tried not to melt, which was relatively easy, given how comfortably cool it was down here. Greece should seriously consider moving underground for the summer.

"For now," Melas said.

"It's one of the safest places in Greece," Aunt Rita said.

"What about earthquakes?" I asked her.

"Earthquake-proof," Grandma told me. "It does not meet the codes—it exceeds them."

Of course. I should have known.

I leaned against the kitchen counter, arms folded. Too many pieces of this puzzle were missing, and no one had bothered to show me the picture on the box. "Can someone tell me exactly what's going on?"

"Come back to my room and I'll tell you all about it." Melas looked me over as he said it.

Grandma gave him one of her best stink-eyes. "Tell her without using your penis or your hands."

I wasn't sure that was possible. Cut off a Greek's hands and you'd be halving their ability to communicate. All that hand waving, they were fighting obesity one conversation at a time.

It wasn't until I got a load of Melas's mouth tugging at the corner

as he stood that I realized the graze Papou mentioned was more than just a scratch. What the hell had happened on that stakeout?

The detective slung his arm around my shoulder. "Help a wounded cop," he said.

Grandma glared in his direction. "What did I say about hands?"

We were in a kitchen. With knives. If I were Melas I wouldn't be risking my hands for a quick feel that could never go anywhere.

"Maybe we should go upstairs, get some fresh air and sun," I said.

He jerked his chin up once for No. "Can't risk it."

I followed him down the short hallway to his temporary quarters, which looked just like homeless guy's, with fewer books and the addition of a widescreen television. Grandma kept her prisoners and other assorted 'guests' in style. He motioned for me to sit on the bed, while he took the office chair, wincing slightly as he sat.

"Did they shoot you in the ass? Because the faces you're making it looks like they shot you in the ass."

Watching him lift his arm was like waiting on the Broadway Bridge back home to open and close its span. He moved slowly, making no sudden moves, and not because he was worried about Grandma and knives. "It's just a flesh wound—not much worse than a scratch. But it hurts like someone shot me." He smiled at his own joke.

At least one of us was amused. "Melas," I said, resisting the urge to slap his arm.

"I've been through worse." His eyes went soft and gooey. "I like it when you worry about me."

I didn't like it. His job made me scared for him, and being scared for him wasn't my place.

"Just tell me about the stakeout."

He lowered his arm almost as slowly as he'd raised it, leaned back in his seat, arms folded. "We got a tipoff that some Germans staying in Agria were in possession of contraband. Counterfeit Euros, counterfeit papers, passports that kind of thing."

The bottom fell out of my stomach. "Huh."

He gave me a funny look. "Normally counterfeiting is a federal matter, but they're stretched thin and we were there, so ..." He rubbed his head with his good arm. "It's been a tough summer. Got a lot of people in the country who shouldn't be. They're all flooding north to Macedonia, using Greece as a stepping-stone. Refugees from places like Syria, mostly. They're on their way to places like Germany to make a better life. So these Germans set up shop in Agria to profit from the desperate. It's perfect. Coastal, a busy tourist town."

I could see that. A seaside village like Agria, nobody looked too closely unless you were a local. Tourists came and went in relative anonymity. Unless you had the bad sense to get drunk and make sweet

love to a chicken, you could pass through undigested.

“How many Germans?”

“Three. Two men and a woman.”

The sirens went off in my head. I wished they’d shut up so I could think. “So what happened?”

“We watched, we listened, and when the time was right, we went in. They were waiting for us, with guns. The woman escaped. We got one of the men, and the other one is dead. The guy won’t talk—in any language.”

I shook my head, to clear the fog, mostly. “So ... why is there a pretend Melas in the hospital under guard, and why are you in Grandma’s dungeon?”

“The answer to the first part of your question is: bait. We think the woman or someone connected to them will come back to finish me off.”

“How would they get past the guards?”

He looked uncomfortable. “They have ties to a German crime syndicate. Close ties.”

“As in, they’re actually part of German crime syndicate?”

“Yes.”

My uncle Kostas, who I’d never met, was about to become the head of his own organized crime family in Germany. Which I’d interpreted as him currently being part of another syndicate. Raw sewage began to slop around in my stomach. There was a nasty metallic taste on my tongue. First my Dad’s disappearance, then the counterfeit euros, a safe full of fake-o passports, real money, a gun, and now this. Things were looking grubbier by the minute.

“Is my uncle involved?”

“Maybe. Maybe not. Baboulas thinks your uncle Kostas wouldn’t be stupid enough or disrespectful enough to piss in her territory. But the syndicate he’s been working with is muscling in. Could be they believe Baboulas will step back if she thinks this is her son’s call.”

So my uncle and the counterfeiting *were* connected. “What do you think?”

“I think they don’t know Baboulas.” He tried to smile, but failed miserably. I knew the feeling. If my uncle was involved then this could be war. And somehow, Dad was tangled up in this—I just knew it.

I could have told him then and there about what I’d found in Dad’s safe and about my suspicions, but I didn’t. Up until a few weeks ago I was a law-abiding citizen without so much as a parking ticket. But things had changed; I was changing. And I had to do whatever it took to protect Dad, to get him back in one living piece.

“And now you’re down here so no one knows you’re not in that

hospital bed, in case they come to finish you off.”

His face contorted. “This is the worst part of a gunshot wound. Itchy back. Can’t reach.”

“Have you seen a bear? They rub up and down trees. You could use the doorframe.”

He looked at me with puppy dog eyes. “Or you could scratch it for me.”

“Grandma might cut off your hands.”

Grandma’s voice came floating through the wall. “I am sharpening the knife right now.”

“Show an injured policeman some compassion, Kyria Katerina,” Melas called out.

There was a short pause. “Okay, but remember the knife.”

He swiveled in his chair so I could get a clear shot at his back. “You’ll have to lift my shirt,” he said in a low voice. “I can’t, and it’s better on bare skin.”

I sighed like it was killing me, which it kind of was. Touching him would be like shoving him at a land mine and hoping for a good outcome. Grandma was the land mine in that metaphor. He leaned forward so that the hem of his shirt rode up. I lifted slowly. Didn’t want to accidentally brush the fabric over his wound. Then I got a good look at what he was hiding under his clothes.

My eyes bugged.

His back was a jungle of scar tissue. Twisty limbs of silver and gold that wandered across his skin and back again. It was eerily reminiscent of Xander’s back. Did I say reminiscent? I meant borderline identical.

I swallowed and said nothing. Melas had mentioned they had known each other while they were serving in the military. Greece had compulsory national service, nine months’ worth in the army, navy, or air force. But these scars weren’t exactly the kind of thing you got from some kind of hazing, or whatever they did in the army. This looked like a major ass kicking by a Teppanyaki chef.

“Whereabouts?” I said in a voice that sounded paper-thin.

“Left shoulder blade.”

My nails connected with his skin, and he groaned.

“Jesus,” he said. “Down and right ...” My hand moved. “Oh yeah, like that.”

It took everything thing I had not to skate my fingertips across the silver-gold rivers. But I had the feeling I could do that all day and never find the real source.

“There. Better?” I tugged his shirt down.

“Yes ...” He grinned ruefully. “... and no.”

I returned to my seat on the bed, crossed my legs. I definitely

didn't glance at his back. Nope, not me. No siree. I was above that.

Melas was on to me. "You okay?"

"What's more than okay? Whatever it is, I'm that."

He settled back in the chair, resumed folding his arms. I tried not to think about how good and hard and warm he had felt.

"You going to ask about the scars?"

"No."

"You can."

"Don't want to."

He grinned. "I said you could ask. Doesn't mean I was going to tell you."

Rat bastard. "The German woman," I said, changing the subject. "Any idea where she is?"

He switched back to the all-business channel, too. "If we knew we'd drag her in."

"And the dead guy?"

"Volos hospital morgue. Why?"

I shrugged. "No reason."

"Katerina ..."

"What? I'm just curious, that's all."

And I was curious, but that wasn't all I was. I had to know if he was one of the three Marika and I had helped in Makria that day—one of the three who had paid for meat with funny money.

"I know that tone ..."

"No, you don't. We only just met. You don't know anything about me."

He rolled closer, until his mouth was close to my ear. His breath was warm and it was making me happy down in my underwear. Stupid hormones.

"I know you liked my handcuffs."

"Did not."

"Yeah, you liked them. And I liked them on you. You should come over to play sometime."

"No. No play. Grandma doesn't allow play dates."

He closed the infinitesimal gap between us, skimming my ear lobe with his lips. "She doesn't have to know."

"She knows everything."

In sync, we turned our heads to look at the wall. Melas pushed back. "You're right," he said. "I like my hands on the ends of my wrists."

"They stop your arms from fraying."

"I don't know what that means, but I like the way you say it."

I jumped up before I picked up a shovel and dug myself a deeper hole. Man troubles I didn't need—and Melas was trouble. He liked

married women—well, one married woman, and she was a Makris. She'd had his son and was passing the boy off as one of Grandma's brood. Both she and Melas would be dead meat if anyone ever found out. What's that if it's not trouble?

"I have to go," I said. "I need a shower and ..." I thought of Grandma's bathroom with its complete and utter lack of a toilet. What she had was an outhouse—heavy on the *out*. It was outside. In her garden. "... A shower, and some of whatever Grandma's been baking lately."

"You coming back?"

"Maybe."

He laughed. "Come back later. We have Scrabble."

"Greek Scrabble."

"I have cards."

"Tempting but ..."

"I'll let you win."

"Deal. And shave, would you."

"You don't like it? Or you do like it, and that's the problem."

"Yes."

He grinned.

Chapter 7

IT WAS STILL summer when I came out of the closet. I took a right at the exterior door, cut past the swimming pool, where the family's kids were pretending to be monsters and superheroes. Some of their mothers were hiding under the shade of the various umbrellas and pergolas in the courtyard, and every so often they'd stop the gossip machine to pitch death threats and promises of extreme violence at their offspring. The kids didn't care; they were kids and it was summer.

Grandma's small yard was empty of people and filled with plant life, which meant I could duck into the outhouse without buckets of anxiety manifesting. Maybe I should have taken Grandma up on her offer to house me temporarily in the main building, but no ... I'd gone all sentimental after she wove a heartwarming story about visiting America behind Dad's back and playing with me at the playground—a visit I didn't remember. End result: I was still peeing in an outhouse, instead of indoors like a regular person with first-world problems.

After, I snuck out and put on my most casual walk. Who'd been peeing in an outhouse? Not me. Nope.

I ducked into Grandma's should-be-condemned heap and scoped out the spotless kitchen. The refrigerator was as old as Grandma, with one of those lift-and-pull handles. The lower cupboards had flowered curtains for doors. My grandfather was in his usual place on the windowsill, his ashes at rest in an olive oil can. Until about ten years ago, cremation was anathema in the Greek Orthodox Church, so why someone had thrown him into a furnace, poured him into the tin, and taped a postmortem photograph on the front (to be fair, he looked alive, except for the closed eyes—which was like every driver's license photo I'd ever had) nobody had said. And I was slightly afraid to ask. Someone might tell me. Knowing this family the truth could be more nightmarish than blissful ignorance.

The counter was holding a cornucopia of Greek sugary treats. The omnipresent baklava; *kataifi*, its hairy cousin; *finikia*, brown blobs of turd-shaped heaven soaked in honey syrup; and a *galaktobouriko*—custard pie—that was in the late stages of cooling. My stomach rumbled. I hadn't eaten since the *moussaka* on the plane. Still, I was a travel-grubby, rumple-clothed mess. Clean first, eat later.

Fifteen minutes later I was back in the kitchen, forking a piece of everything into my mouth, one bite at a time. It was a hardship but

somebody had to do it. If I thought about it, I was kind of a hero, taking one for mankind. If you wanted diabetes, Greece was a great place to start, followed by a trip to the Texas State Fair.

As I ate I tried to assemble everything I knew so far into something that didn't look like the plot of a hackneyed mob flick. Deception, kidnapping, territory grabs. All that was missing was Martin Scorsese, a mountain of blow, De Niro, and answers. Dad was still missing. There had been a dead cop in our house. Vice cops had followed me across the world. Melas had been shot by—possibly—the same Germans who'd passed bad money in Makria. And my uncle was involved in God only knew how much of it.

I cleaned my plate, returned it to the cupboard, and shoved my feet into sandals that more or less went with the sundress I'd thrown on. With Grandma temporarily down in the dungeon I'd risked my reputation by walking around her house barefoot. Go barefoot in Greece and people assume you're poor. You could roll in glue and euros but everyone would still peg you as a pauper if you were shoeless. All those stories Dad had told me when I was a kid, there was always some poor schmo who patched his Ancient Greek sandals with newspaper or cardboard so no one would know he was destitute. Dad's stories were a horrifying blend of mythology and real life, set in some indeterminate time period that could have been anywhen. My childhood self didn't know enough back then to call him on it and say, *Ha-ha! In Ancient Greece nobody wore shoes indoors, so your stories are obviously contemporary.*

I hoofed it over to Marika and Takis' second-floor corner apartment, pressed their doorbell. Hell was breaking out on the other side of the door. Demons were dragging themselves out of the pits, causing havoc, pain, and ungodly messes. There was suffering happening—loud suffering. Either that or the next generation wasn't down with the news that their allowances weren't about to be raised any time soon. I wondered if Stavros had made it out with his dignity intact. If so, he was probably hiding out in his own apartment, whipping up a gourmet consolation dinner, or flogging the mortadella to the kind of porn that made even hardcore kinksters barf.

There was a loud thump, and then Marika yanked the door open. She grabbed my arm, hauled me in.

"Save me before I cut off their heads and stick them on pikes to scare off my enemies."

"Wow, overkill," I said.

"You say that now ... Go stand in the living room and wait five minutes. Then you will see. I will get the pikes ready."

She vanished into the kitchen, leaving me with the devil's troupe of flying monkeys. This batch of Makris boys was more like a science

experiment between their two parents. They had their father's gangly bodies and their mother's face. Which was lucky for them; Marika was big and sturdy but she had the face of a slightly annoyed angel ... with a hairy upper lip problem that she kept at bay with a pair of tweezers. I hadn't noticed at first, but then she whipped out the tweezers on the plane and began yanking out the weeds.

I looked at the boys, trying not to show fear. "Did you get your allowance raised?"

They hung their heads. "No. Baba beat us."

I was outraged—quietly and using only my facial expression.

Marika saw it and laughed. "He beat them, yes, at their favorite video game."

"Why'd you have to tell her that?" the eldest boy said, scowling. "We wanted her to feel sorry for us."

"Takis is your father," I said. "I already feel sorry for you."

My gaze swung from Marika to her kids and back again. "I don't suppose you want to—"

"Let me grab my bag," she said, ripping off her apron.

We esCaped. Marika had her big shoulder bag of (probably) guns and I had the car keys.

"Where are we going?" she wanted to know as we hoofed it to the car.

"Morgue."

"Can I come in this time or do I have to wait in the car."

"You can come in. Unless you don't want to."

"Are there dead bodies lying all over the place?"

"No."

"Zombies?"

"Zombies aren't real."

"They are in Haiti."

She had me there. "Not movie zombies, eating brains and stuff. Haitian zombies just sort of shuffle around and drool, I think."

"Where is the fun in that? I packed a stake anyway."

"That's vampires."

"Anything will die if you hammer a wooden stake into its head."

She had me there.

Ten minutes later we were circling the hospital parking lot, hunting for a place to park. Half an hour after that we were trudging up the street, after parking on the street three blocks down. Traffic in Greece sucked; parking was Thunderdome. At least the hospital was air-conditioned. We stood just inside the door, air-con chilling us to

room temperature, and then we descended to the hospital's lower level in search of a dead German.

So I had kind of stretched the truth into a less gruesome shape when Marika asked about corpses. They weren't sprawled out on the floor, oozing, but the Volos Hospital morgue was overcrowded with guests who had checked out but couldn't leave—an unexpected side effect of the current economic woes. Somebody died, the family couldn't afford to bury them, so they accidentally, maybe, sort of forgot to have their loved one picked up and buried. But Greece couldn't afford to pay for a bunch of burials either, so the bodies stayed in the morgue until the hospital could get the government to spit up a few euros to slap them in the ground.

The attendant was an anthropomorphic terrier who always looked on the verge of tears ... or laughter. His name was Kafes (Coffee) and he gave the distinct impression that he'd rather be on a beach knocking back cocktails. Instead he was stuck down here with dead people, and he wasn't happy about it.

He grunted when he saw me. "I remember you. Please tell me you have come to claim someone. Get them out of here. I need the space for five more."

I smashed his heart by telling him we were there to look at the dead German.

He looked bereft. "I hate this job," he said. "But the benefits are too good."

"Greece still does benefits?"

"Barely. But as long as I work here they will bury my family and me for free if we die. These days that's a good deal."

He led us down the hallway to a room filled with sheet-covered stretchers. The walls were the pale green of constant sadness, the scent was death with a hint of pine. I shivered. The temperature was Arctic.

"We have to keep the air conditioning extra low," Kafes said when I commented. "We don't have enough refrigerators."

"Wouldn't it be cheaper to bury the extras?"

He shrugged. "That is Greek bureaucracy for you."

"I think that's all bureaucracy," I said. "It's never anyone's job to do anything you need done."

He made an approving noise. "You ready?"

Marika was rifling through her big bag. "Wait. I did not bring holy water, but I have a cross and a stake."

We looked at her. "It's a dead body," I said. "Not a vampire. We already covered this."

"You never know," she said darkly.

"Not until it leaps up and bites you," Kafes said. "Then you know."

But lucky for you we sprinkle holy water on all the dead, just in case.”

I felt my forehead wrinkle up. “Really?”

“No.” He yanked back the sheet. Marika screamed.

“Sorry,” she said, looking not at all sorry. “Reflex.”

In death, the German was the color of a fish’s belly. He was that hungry kind of lean, like a runner. His hair was sandy, his face stubbled, and there was a bloody crater in the middle of his chest.

“We haven’t had time to stitch him up yet,” Kafes said. “Bad, bad business. Now your detective friend is in the hospital. Who knows if he’ll make it down to see me?” He laughed. “Sorry—morgue humor. It’s all we have down here.”

I didn’t say anything. It didn’t seem smart to mention that Melas was fine and hiding in Grandma’s dungeon with a homeless guy and a stack of board games. My gaze wandered sideways to Marika. Did she or didn’t she know about Melas? I wasn’t about to ask. Anyway, she was engrossed in the dead German.

“I know him,” she said. “He asked me for *pouts*.”

“That sounds like Germans,” Kafes said. “And the Japanese. And the Turks.”

My eyebrow took a hike. “You mean everyone who isn’t Greek?”

“I was getting around to include everyone who is not Greek,” he admitted. “And the Greeks who vote for the other guys.”

I snorted and tried to concentrate on the German’s face. It wasn’t easy with the gaping hellhole in his chest. Marika was right; he was one of the three from Makria, although they hadn’t been asking for penis. They had been looking for a butcher’s shop. Butcher and *pouts* sound uncannily alike, especially if your mind leans toward sewer level.

“That’s the guy from Makria,” I said.

Marika sniffed. She seemed disappointed about the lack of undead in the morgue. “I wonder if he ever found his meat?”

Kafes brightened up. “So you know him? Great. Find his family and get him out of here, I beg you.”

“I know begging,” Marika said, stuffing the stake and cross back into her bag. “I have sons and a husband and I know begging. That does not look like begging.”

“I’m on my knees in my head,” Kafes said.

Marika nudged me. “Should we make him beg properly?”

“What? No. We’re not henchmen—we’re just ...” I hunted around for an answer. “... two curious women.”

“You are curious,” Marika said. “I want to shoot things, and maybe set them on fire.”

Kafes jerked his chin up. “We don’t have a crematorium. Budget restraints.”

I thanked him for his time, and swore on my mother's life that I'd find the German's family and get him the hell out of the morgue. What I didn't tell Kafes was that my mother was already dead, and therefore her life wasn't in any danger if I failed ... or didn't bother trying. Mom, wherever she was, would forgive me. She had been a practical woman. God, I missed her.

The sun had been waiting for us this whole time. It ambushed us with blister-inducing heat as we stepped through the hospital doors. The stench of pine immediately evaporated, replaced with the burning scent of carcinogenic exhaust fumes.

"What's with all the violence?" I said to Marika.

She shrugged. "Repression. Now I have a chance to act out I am acting out. Ignore me and eventually I will stop."

"That sounds like some kind of child psychology."

"That is exactly it is. What do you expect, I am a mother."

I'd always thought one day when I was a real grown-up I'd get married and have a family. Now, looking at Marika, I wasn't sure. My one venture towards marriage had ended badly when I walked in on my fiancé getting stabbed in the throat with a boner. My record so far wasn't good. What if I married a Takis and spawned demons? It could happen.

"What now?" Marika wanted to know.

Good question. I didn't like what had to come next. It meant trusting in people I wasn't sure I could trust. My grandmother was, after all, a mob boss. A semi-honorable one, if people were to be believed. But still a mob boss. They're not exactly paragons of virtue and morality. Not to mention Grandma would be pissed that I had kept the counterfeiting issue to myself.

"I have to talk to Grandma about some things. I don't want to, but I have to."

"I know the feeling. Baboulas is scary. I want to talk to her, too, but I am afraid."

"What about?"

"A job."

"What kind of job?" Because I knew what kind of jobs Grandma had available, and I was sure most of them involved guns or drugs.

"Bodyguard."

"Whose bodyguard?"

She looked at me.

"I already have a bodyguard." I did have a bodyguard. His name was Elias and he was the former employee of a now-dead Albanian named Fatmir the Poor. He'd originally been hired to kill me, but he switched teams when I made him a better offer.

She glanced around. "Where is he?"

"You can't see him, that's how good he is."

"Hmm," she said, unimpressed. "Where was he when you needed a stake and holy water?"

"You didn't have holy water."

"And that is why I had a cross—as backup. Where was Elias then, eh?"

Probably watching for real threats, I thought. But I didn't say that. "Maybe he went for holy water," I said. "That we didn't need anyway."

She stomped over to the Beetle, dumped her bag on the floor.

"Next time we go to a morgue I will not forget holy water. You never know."

"Do you think maybe you watch too much TV?"

"No. Why?"

I slid behind the wheel, buckled up. "No reason."

Back at the compound, the conversation with Grandma was going badly, and I hadn't even gotten to the part where Marika wanted a paycheck to hang out with me.

("I do not want money to spend time with you," Marika said. "We are friends and family, yes? What I want is money for the shooting and setting fires if I have to set one, while I am spending time with you.")

"Why would you need to set a fire?"

"You never know.")

Grandma was silent. And baking. Baking intently, like she was planning a murder. Which, under the circumstances—circumstances being her entire adult life—she might be. Hopefully not my murder.

I had come clean about the passports in Dad's safe, the cash, the gun, and the counterfeit euros the Germans had spent in Makria's meat market. And she poured and stirred and kneaded without once looking up.

Finally I said, "What are you baking?"

"Something for tomorrow."

"What's tomorrow?"

"The day after today."

"And you say I'm like Dad. I see where he gets it from."

"Clever girl. My husband—your grandfather—had no sense of humor." She glanced over at the oil container on the windowsill, pointed to it with her wooden spoon. "You know it is true."

For a moment it was like having a real relationship with a real grandmother instead of a mob boss who killed people the way normal

humans popped candy.

"I will be away tomorrow," she said. "Business that can not wait. Xander will be coming with me. But you will have Rita and Takis at your disposal. And anyone else you need."

"For ...?"

"You are proving to be a resourceful young woman. I like that—it reminds me of me. And it is no secret that I want you to take over when I ... when I retire from the business."

"You mean when you die?"

"Retire. I am immortal. My plan is to live forever, but who says I want to do this same work for all that time? I might retire to an island, make a big garden, play with my great-grandchildren." She gave me a meaningful look.

"Ha-ha." That's when I dropped Marika's request into the conversation. You'd think I was Medusa, the way Grandma turned to stone.

"No," she said. "The wives do not work for the family. They take care of their children—that is their job."

"I didn't know you were a raging sexist."

"I am a practical woman. The children in this family have always been raised by their mothers. If something happens to their fathers, they still have one living parent."

"What about your kids?"

"Do not try to use logic against me, Katerina." She did the waving thing with the spoon again, this time in my direction. "You will lose."

We talked more after that. She said she believed the German woman was still in the area, that she'd probably make an attempt on the third guy's life to silence him before the cops could squeeze him like a lemon.

"Would she do that, really?"

"After all you have seen and learned recently, do you doubt it?"

"Yes."

"You are not too old to eat wood. I want you to see if the other one will talk to you."

"Isn't he in jail?"

"For now."

That sounded ominous—probably because it was ominous. One way or another, I thought, that guy was living on borrowed time. No ... in this business the time was most likely stolen.

"Don't you have people who can do this? Qualified people." Cripes. Here I was, talking like there was some kind of college that trained

mobsters.

“Who can I trust more than my own granddaughter, eh?”

By the time I slouched out of bed the next morning, Grandma was gone. The fruits of her frantic baking yesterday were on the counter, alone, looking sad. What use were baked goods if they weren't being eaten?

Feeling benevolent, I shoveled a couple of pieces of everything into a plastic container and took the broom closet's escalator to the dungeon. Melas was in the kitchen, knocking back coffee, flipping through the newspaper—all the newspapers, judging by the stack on the table. His face had morphed from gimme-some-of-that stubbled to one-step-closer-and-I'll-mace-you bearded. Back home the bearded hipster look had seized the nation the way flower power had rocked the 60s. It was a great equalizer, if you were a guy. Beards cooled down the hot guys and partially concealed the less fortunate.

“Don't you have a razor?” I said, sliding the container onto the counter.

“Is that breakfast? Because it looks like breakfast to me.”

“No. No breakfast for you until you shave.”

“Blackmail? You play dirty.”

“Family trait.”

He folded the newspaper, slow and methodical, and dropped it on the table, with a soft *thunk*. “Right now, I'm the hungriest man who ever walked the earth. And the way I see it is that you're standing between me and cake.”

“No cake. Just *baklava*, *kataifi*, some *finikia*, and a few *kourabiethes*.”

He pushed out his chair, stood, and began a slow approach.

“Did someone say cake?” Homeless Guy called out from his luxury cell at the end of the row.

“There's no cake!” I said.

“I can smell sugar.”

“My sugar,” Melas said, closing in on me. I flattened my back against the counter, hiding the container behind me.

“You want some of this?”

“You have no idea.”

“Fine.” I gulped. He was dangerously close now. His eyes had gone soft and several shades darker. Not fifty shades, but maybe thirty. “I'll give you some—all you can eat—but it will cost you. And I want payment up front.”

“Hey—save some for me!” Homeless Guy said.

Melas scowled. "He's not getting any of your cake."

"I told you: it's not cake."

"Let's talk about this payment. What do you want?" The way he looked me up and down, slowly, erotically, dragging his gaze over my body told me what he considered adequate payment for Grandma's baking. Too bad her baked goods were worth more—at least right now.

I told him. His face shuttered. He went back to the chair, wincing as he sat.

"Do you need painkillers?" Because I could get some—easy. If not from Family then definitely from a dealer who was skating close to friendly territory.

He jerked his chin up once for No. "The pain reminds me that I'm lucky to be alive."

Ugh. Men. "Newsflash: You're not Chuck Norris."

He grinned, but it was a grim thing. "Chuck Norris isn't Chuck Norris anymore either. He got old. They'll never let you in to see the German. And I'm not sure they should."

"Grandma wants me to talk to him."

"Why you?"

"Because I'm charming and beautiful."

The joke fell flat. "He's dangerous."

"My whole family is dangerous. They out-dangerous his dangerous."

"You're not them."

But Grandma was trying to make me one of them, wasn't she? The Magic 8 Ball app on my phone said it was undecided.

"What are you doing?" Melas wanted to know. I showed him my phone's screen and he laughed. "You're one of a kind, Katerina Makris." The laugh died fast. "You've been lucky so far. You dodged the Baptist and the Eagle," he said, referring to the two nuts that had tried to kill me. Well, the Eagle wanted to marry me, but when I refused he tried to kill me, so I wasn't sure he counted in whatever point Melas was trying to make. "But what happens if you're not so lucky next time? These people don't mess around. They kill people. Your family kills people. What if you get caught in the middle and I can't protect you?"

"I've got a bodyguard," I reminded him. "Elias is on the job. And Marika wants to be his backup."

His laugh was reminiscent of a dog with croup. "Marika! Takis' wife? How is she qualified to be your bodyguard?"

"She has sons. Their apartment is a war zone."

"Marika is a stay-at-home mother. She doesn't know anything about being a bodyguard. I bet she couldn't even fire a gun."

“Uh ...”

“Tell me she doesn’t have a gun.”

“Gun. Singular, right? Nope, she doesn’t have *a* gun.”

“Jesus,” he said. “Stop talking—at least about that. Nobody is going to let you in to see the German. Not if they know what’s good for them or you. So don’t even ask.”

“I am not happy about this,” the policeman said. He was shaped like a barrel. All that was missing was Bilbo Baggins to ride him down a river. Usually he wore a *tzatziki* stain on his shirt, but this time it looked more like coffee. The barrel was Police Sergeant Pappas, and he had capitulated quickly when he saw what was in the box I sat on his desk. Grandma’s cooking had that effect on people. I didn’t care about his heart—I cut directly to his key ring, via his stomach.

“That makes two of us,” I said.

He looked past me to my minor entourage: Elias, who wasn’t hiding today, and Lopez and Bishop. “Who are they?”

My designated bodyguard Elias was a slimly built thirty-something who had the uncanny ability to blend in with the background, the foreground, and possibly the ground.

I nodded at Elias. “He’s with me. Those other two are crazy stalkers who won’t leave me alone.” I leaned closer, whispered, “I think they’re Scientologists. Do you think you could ...?”

“No problem. I will have somebody take care of them.” Pappas picked up the phone, dialed, told whoever was on the other end to get here—and fast. “That was my mother,” he said. “She will make them wish they were dead.”

“Perfect.”

Pappas didn’t look sure about any of this. “Come. And tell Baboulas I helped you, eh?”

“I’ll make sure she knows you were more than helpful.”

His smile was small and tight, like safe end of a cat. “This way.”

This particular department was an offshoot of Volos’s main police department. The other police building was a clash between two titans: glass and steel. It was impressive. It had air conditioning. This building had a handful of windows and front doors they propped open with bricks. The other building probably had a proper lockup facility. This one had two adjoining cells in an airless room. A ceiling fan limped in circles overhead, as effective as flinging a water balloon in the desert. Both cells were currently occupied—one with the German I remembered from Makria, the other with what smelled like a portable distillery. The skinny kid was facedown on what passed for a bed,

sawing logs. He reminded me of Donk, with his wannabe homey costume. What was it about young guys that they didn't want to invest in belts?

"Don't mind the drunk," Police Sergeant Pappas said mildly. "Who knows how long he will be out. A week, by the smell of him."

"Tourist?"

He went *tst*. "Greek boy."

I leaned over, took another glance at the stick figure on the bed. He had shoes like Donk, too. Big clodhopper Nikes. Air Jordans. Identical to Donk's.

Elias followed me in. He took a look at the body on the bunk. "Hey, it's Donk. What's he doing here?"

Oh boy.

Police Sergeant Pappas looked at us. "You know him?"

"Do you know a man called Baby Dimitri?" I asked.

"I know a loser criminal who calls himself Baby Dimitri. Owns a shoe and souvenir shop."

"Same guy," I said. "That's his nephew."

Blood drained out of the cop's face. "Virgin Mary, he'll kill us!"

"No. Worst case he'll have his buddy Laki toss a Molotov cocktail through one of your open windows. Maybe the front doors."

Baby Dimitri had already pegged Donk as a bum. First he had fobbed his nephew off on a Bulgarian drug dealer named Penka, then the Godfather of the Night and Espadrilles decided I was in need of an apprentice or some such garbage. For a few days there, where I went, Donk went, until the teenager had decided to turn assassin and collect a bounty on my head. His plan had been to impress his uncle. Now he was in the lockup, impressing no one, drooling on a mattress that had seen a lot of bodily fluids. Poor, stupid kid.

"But ... what am I going to do with him?" Pappas wanted to know.

I shrugged. "Let him sleep it off, same as anyone else in his condition. Where did you find him?"

"He came to us. Said he had information about a murder."

Uh oh. "A murder?"

"That's all he said. Then he passed out, face first on the grass outside."

"There isn't any grass outside."

"Huh," he said. "All this time I thought there was. That must be why his face was scraped and bleeding—no grass."

My mind was still on this murder Donk had mentioned. "We can, uh, take him with us if you like. Baby Dimitri never has to know you locked up his nephew."

He brightened. "Would you? Wait—what about the murder?"

"If he says anything about it we'll bring him back." Yeah, that

would happen. “Can I ...?” I nodded to the German, who was sulking on his bunk, hands behind his head.

Pappas nodded. “Any problems, just scream.”

That was reassuring.

Police Sergeant Pappas backed out of the room, pulling the door shut with him. Finally it was Elias, Donk, the German, and me. Cozy.

I approached the bars. I already knew he spoke English, so I went with that first. “We’ve met. Do you remember?”

Nothing.

“I was up in Makria with a friend. You asked her for directions to a meat market.” I avoided the B word, on account of how it made me want to snicker. This wasn’t a snickering situation. “We helped you out, then you went and paid for your purchase in fake money. The money was good—but not good enough. I wonder what your boss will have to say about that.”

Nothing.

“You want me to piss on him?” Elias offered. “I can reach him from here, I think.”

His heart was in the right place: in the middle of his chest and slightly left. “Dude, no. No water sports.”

The German had that blue-eyed blond thing going on, the kind Hitler went weak in the eugenics for. In Makria he had seemed soft and unformed, a cookie dough figure. Skinny fat. He had come across as window dressing, scenery in a reality TV show about traveling around Europe on five euros a day. Now he looked like he was playing the part of Homicidal Hitchhiker in a Hostel. Only things missing were the airport-battered backpack in a dull red or olive green, and a tan. Throw him in the snow and he’d be lost unless you spotted those ice blue eyes ... or his groovy sandals.

“I don’t really know anything about Germany,” I went on. “Oktoberfest. Bratwurst. BMWs. Oooh, I drive a German car. I have a Volkswagen Beetle. I like it but it’s not my Jeep.”

He raised his head, stabbed me in the face with his cold eyes. “Jeep is shit.”

“What do you drive?”

He grunted. “Who drives? I ride bicycle. Better for the environment. Cheaper.”

“Do you recycle?”

“Of course I recycle. What kind of monster doesn’t recycle?”

Me. Sometimes. It was the part about washing stuff that got me. Who wants to waste time washing their garbage before throwing it away?

He sat up, looked me up and down like I was that dirty garbage thoughtlessly tossed in the regular bin. “You don’t recycle.”

"I do too recycle," I said.

"Do you kick puppies? Harpoon seals?"

"Hey—you don't harpoon seals, you club them. Harpoons are for whales."

He stabbed the air with his finger. "See? You are a whale-killing, seal-murderer."

"I recycle," I mumbled, desperately hunting for something pertinent to ask. He was the bad guy here; I was just lazy and negligent. "Anyway, what do you know about the counterfeit euros you used to buy meat?"

He smirked. "Nothing."

Elias leaned over to me. "Look at that face. He knows something."

I looked at Elias, surprised. "You understand English?"

"Sure." He shrugged. "English, French, Klingon."

My bodyguard was full of surprises. I wouldn't have figured him for a Trekkie.

"We need to talk," I said. "And also watch some Star Trek."

The German scoffed. "Star Trek! Star Wars is superior."

"Counterfeit euros," I said.

"I don't know anything. Someone says, 'Go to Greece. Spend some money.' I come to Greece, spend some money, the police shoot at me, and now I am in jail, talking to an idiot."

"I think he's talking about you," Elias said.

"I got that part," I muttered. "That someone who told you to come to Greece, who was it?"

He grinned a grin that would have been at home on Goebbels's face, and flopped back on the bed, hands behind his head again. "Wouldn't you like to know?"

"Uh, yeah. That's why I asked."

"Nobody. A ghost. So I came to Greece with some friends and a pocketful of money."

"Fake money."

"It looked real. Why do you care anyway? Greece's money is Germany's money. We let this country borrow it. If we want to give them toy money, so what?"

"One of those friends of yours is dead."

"Which one?"

"The guy. Big hole in his chest. You could park a German car in that hole—that's how big."

He grunted. "And the other one?"

"Missing. You know a man called Kostas Makris?"

"I know a lot of people."

"Michail Makris?"

"I'm not answering any more of your questions."

“Katerina Makri?”

“La-la-la, I can’t hear you.”

“Can you hear me now?”

“La-la-la.”

“How about now?”

The tuneless singing continued.

“Probably she’s going to kill you,” I said. “Your German friend.”

Magic. The singing stopped. “What?”

“That’s what I heard?”

“Heard from who?”

“La-la-la,” I said, shoving my fingers in my ears.

Before we left, Police Sergeant Pappas sprung Donk. Between us, Elias and I hauled the inebriated teenager to the Beetle and tossed him in the backseat. We figured he wouldn’t feel a thing anyway. And if he did, we’d deny everything and blame it on someone we didn’t like.

“Who?” Elias wanted to know.

“Someone everyone hates.”

He nodded. “Ivan the Terrible.”

“Donk won’t know who that is.” I didn’t think school was Donk’s bag. He seemed more suited to smoking in the boys’ room and bragging about sex he’d never had.

At the corner I spotted Lopez and Bishop staring up at the sky. A shriveled raisin in black shrink-wrap had a finger pointed in their faces. Her mouth was moving at supersonic speed. I wondered what she was preaching.

“You did this,” Lopez called out.

I flashed him a fake, toothy grin. “You’re welcome!”

The raisin slapped him back to attention.

We jumped into the Beetle and I pulled away from the curb. The American cops tried to make a run for their rental car. Pappas’s mother stuck her foot out, tripped them both with the one move. Something told me she’d practiced on her kids.

“Fack you,” Donk said, rising up in the rearview mirror like the undead. “I know who Ivan the Terrible is. He’s an enemy of my uncle’s.”

I might have screamed, and swerved, and almost flattened an elderly widow staggering across the road with two plastic mesh grocery bags. Yikes! It was true; I was this close to being everything that stupid German said I was.

The old woman set down her bags, chopped her hands at her crotch—a Greek gesture that invited me to suck on something she

most likely didn't have. The nerve of some people.

"You want me to do it back? I can do it back." Elias was overenthusiastic and determined to do a good job.

Heart racing, I eased the Beetle back on track. "No, but thanks. What the hell are you doing?" I tossed the words of my shoulder, into the backseat.

Donk had the audacity to put on an offended face and point at his chest two-handed. "Me? What are you doing?"

"You were in jail! We rescued you!"

"I was under the covers," he said in English.

"Under the covers? You mean undercover?"

"That's what I said. Undercover. Getting close to the enemy."

A light bulb sputtered on in my head. Must have been one of those fluorescent things. "The German?"

"I figured if I could get close to him, find out who he is working for, then that information might be worth something to someone."

"You mean my Family."

"Or my uncle."

"So you pretended to be drunk."

"I wasn't pretending. You ever hear of method acting? I'm like the Greek Brando."

Oh brother. "You're lucky they didn't ship you off to Korydallos." Korydallos Prison Complex was Greece's most infamous prison. Located near the port city of Piraeus, it made American prisons look like palaces. Rat was increasingly on the menu—if you could catch it. Cells were close to standing room only. They probably had a whole wing waiting for my Family. "So did you get anything?"

"Someone came in to question him."

"Who?"

He stared at me in the rearview mirror, rubbed his thumb against his fingers in the universal gesture of 'pay up'. The little worm. "What is it worth to you?"

"Ten euro."

"Show me the money."

I gestured for Elias to get it out of my purse. He passed it back to the wannabe gangster and world's worst actor. Donk stuffed the bill in his baggy pants.

"It was a woman."

"A German woman?"

The little weasel drew an invisible zipper across his lips.

I sighed. "How much?"

"Ten."

Elias crossed his palm with another ten. "American," Donk said.

What did Americans want with him? Maybe euros weren't the only

money the Germans were printing. "Did she come alone? Did you hear what she said?"

His hand shot out, palm up. The fingers wiggled.

"Ten?" I said.

"Twenty."

"For crying out loud!"

Donk shrugged. "If you won't pay, someone will."

"Give him the twenty."

That vanished into his pocket, too. "She came with a man."

"And ...?"

"I think maybe she was stupid. But she was sexy. Nice tits. Good ass. She was old, though. But older women are hotter in bed, so I would do her until I got bored."

I rolled my eyes. "What did they talk about?"

"What is that?" He lifted the twenty to his ear, listened for a moment to, I presumed, the delusional and egotistical voices in his head. "This twenty is lonely. It wants a friend. If you don't pay, maybe my uncle will."

I didn't want anyone scoring information before me, so I paid up. Again. With some grim satisfaction I watched as Elias passed over another twenty.

"They were talking English, so I didn't catch everything. Something about baby seals. She sounded like a freak."

Realization dawned—he was talking about me, the shitweasel.

"I hate you," I said.

"Want me to hurt him?" Elias thumbed the blade he usually kept hidden. "I don't usually do torture, but I've got some good ideas."

"Homey"—Donk pronounced it with an extraneous k attached to the h—"we worked together! We are colleagues."

The pointy end of the knife swung his way. "Just because you fumbled a gun doesn't mean you were an assassin."

"Hey, I had a suit, too. A shiny one."

Elias scoffed.

"No, I've got a better plan," I said, glancing at Donk in the rearview mirror. I pressed the button to raise the top then made sure the back doors were locked. Now he couldn't get out unless he had a pocketknife or a brick. "We're going for a little drive."

"Strip club? You owe me."

"For what?"

"You ruined my undercover work."

"Sure. A strip club" In his dreams.

He punched the air. "Excellent. Good thing you gave me all this sweet cash."

"About the money ..."

His eyes narrowed. "I earned it. Not my fault you're stupid."

For the record, revenge tasted sweet and chewy, like Twizzlers. "It's not real."

He laughed. "Looks real to me."

"Fake."

"I don't believe you."

"Still fake."

"Let him spend it," Elias said. He looked back at Donk. "See how fast the police throw you back in jail. Then they'll stick you on a bus to Korydallos. I hear they like boys in Korydallos."

The kid squirmed in his seat. "Homey don't eat *pouts*."

Elias grinned. "Who said anything about sex? I'm talking food. You're young. The meat hasn't had time to toughen up yet."

"They don't eat people there." Donk was sounding less and less certain.

"Maybe they do," Elias said, "maybe they don't. But inmates go missing there sometimes, and suddenly their cellmates have full bellies and big smiles and toothpicks that look like bone."

Donk's eyes were tearing up. "I want to get out."

"Don't make him cry," I said.

"Men don't cry!" Donk jiggled the door handle but the kiddie locks were doing their job. "It's sweat."

"Relax," I said, "you can get out in a minute. Let me park first."

While he had been leading me down the primrose path, stealing the fake-o money from my pockets, I'd been cruising toward the strip of coast where Baby Dimitri, Godfather of the Night and Statues with Big Wangs kept his shop. Usually he could be found sitting outside with his criminal cronies, backs to the front window. This partially concealed the thin layer of dust that covered the goods in his front window, which I figured was the point.

Today it was Baby Dimitri, Laki, his pyromaniac buddy who was brushing up to eighty, and a third guy I didn't recognize. Baby Dimitri had taken a boot up the butt sometime during the 1960s and landed in 2015. He wore white shoes and trousers with a crease that could carve watermelons. His sleeves were short and rolled to reveal biceps the size of boiled eggs. He was slime personified, but ... I didn't mind the guy. At least he wore his slime up front, where people received ample warning before they slipped.

"Where are we?" Donk's tears had dried up, leaving him red-eyed. "Tell me we're not at my uncle's."

"We're not at your uncle's," I said, all evidence to the contrary.

"Man, you're a real bitch. Even those tits can't make up for this." He eyed them as we all rolled out of the car. "Maybe if you lifted your shirt I'd feel better. Is that a front-closing bra?"

"It's all padding," I lied. "As soon as I take it off—poof!—it vanishes. Without padding I'm so flat walls are jealous."

"That's okay, I'm an ass man anyway."

"You're not man," I said. "But you're an ass. Come on."

We slouched over to Baby Dimitri's shoe-and-souvenir shop, Donk dragging his Clown Jordans.

"Look who it is," Baby Dimitri called out. He had a big shit-eating grin on his face. "It's Katerina Makris-with-an-S, her pet bodyguard, and my worthless nephew."

My compassion kicked in. It was one thing for me to give Donk a hard time, but he was just a kid whose mother didn't seem to have much use for him. Didn't seem right that his own uncle was taking a sledgehammer to his self-esteem.

"Your nephew has been helping me out. Turns out he's good at keeping his ears open."

Baby Dimitri's eyebrows rode an inch higher. "Oh really?"

I looked at Laki. "Don't set fire to my car, okay?"

He grinned. It was a toothless thing; except for a flash of gold he'd probably stolen from a frightened dentist. "Okay, boss."

The third hood—and he had to be a hood; the shiny suit said so, even if he was just wearing the bottom half, jacket draped over the back of the chair—didn't seem to have a name, and since nobody acted like they were about to introduce me any time soon, I figured I'd pretend he wasn't there. He was mid-fifties with a face like an old shoe and hair worn in the slicked-back position.

"He's been undercover."

"Undercover?"

"You did tell me to keep an eye on him, so I put him to work."

Baby Dimitri hiked his eyebrows another fraction of an inch. "He tried to kill you."

"Technically no, he never tried. Mostly he just kept the gun holstered and talked big." Donk's shoulders slumped as Baby Dimitri's joy-o-meter rose. "But," I said quickly, "I'm sure he would have if the opportunity had presented itself."

Baby Dimitri made an unimpressed face. "If I wanted you dead you would be dead. But here you are, alive and yapping like a woman. If my nephew had killed you there would have been war between our families. I don't like war. It's bad for business."

"Unless it is your idea," Laki said.

Baby Dimitri chuckled. "Unless it is my idea."

I thought fast. "Then it's a good thing he showed sound judgment by not assassinating me."

"She's good," the third man said.

"She is the son her grandmother should have had." Baby Dimitri

spat on the ground.

The third wheel laughed.

Baby Dimitri ignored him. "To what do I owe the pleasure of your company?"

"I was just in the area."

"Are we friends now?"

"It's good to have friends."

"It's good to have friends," he repeated. "Just like Katerina."

Laki grinned. "Just like Katerina."

It was getting repetitive here, so I cut to the chase. "Know anything about that gunfight in Agria between some Germans and the police?"

The Godfather of the Shoes and Dusty Window Displays' face went blank. His gaze fixed itself to the beach, where the summer body count was still at its peak. "I read about it in the newspaper, like everybody else. Other than that, I know nothing."

Chapter 8

DID I BELIEVE HIM? Ha-ha-ha—no. As fast as his face had shut down and his mouth clamped shut, I knew he was hiding something. Baby Dimitri was—in my admittedly limited experience—a mouthy kind of guy. If he knew something he enjoyed swinging it around, dancing it in front of me so I'd leap around and do undignified stuff. To him I was a circus monkey.

"I heard they shoot that one cop," Laki said. "The Melas boy."

Baby Dimitri folded his arms, crossed his legs. "You heard nothing. You can't even hear yourself fart."

Laki lifted his legs, let one loose. We all heard it ... then the smell hit. Garbage mingled with sewage. Sewage rubbed elbows with death. Death wadded up the whole mess and pitched it at Satan's sweaty crack. And we the unfortunate were left gasping for fresh air. Thank the gods we were outside.

"I heard that," Laki said, grinning.

Hand shielding my nose from the deadly radiation, I said, "Melas is in the hospital. He's in bad shape. One German is dead. One is in the lockup. The other one ran away."

Baby Dimitri snorted. Laki laughed. The third guy was smiling the dim smile of an innumerate who was slowly counting their marbles, trying to decide if several were missing.

"Ran away where?" Donk wanted to know.

"Doesn't matter," his uncle snapped. "Not our business." Laki unleashed his death gas again. It sounded like a gunshot. "Laki, go for a walk, eh? Get it all out."

"My car," I said, wagging my finger at him. "No fire, okay?"

Laki grinned and nodded, which was only marginally comforting. Gray pants flapping around his legs, he sauntered along the sidewalk, darting across the road when there was a brief lull in traffic. For the walking dead he could sure move.

Semi confident he wouldn't blow up my car, I turned back to Baby Dimitri. He was picking at his teeth with his pinkie. "I talked to the guy in jail. He was less than helpful. Also, he accused me of harpooning whales."

Baby Dimitri's attention wandered off to do some babe watching. There was a lot of flesh on display across the street, although some had seen more summers than others. More than one handbag was stretched out on a rattan mat, working on that patina.

“Why don’t you go for a swim?” I said to the Godfather of Floridian Bad Taste.

He slapped the air, one-handed. “Bah! Swimming is for the young.”

“Mama says Theo Dimitri is scared of the water,” Donk said.

“Your mother talks too much.” Baby Dimitri pointed at him. “She needs to learn to shut her mouth or I will cut off her allowance.”

Then something went *BOOM*.

Laki. It had to be. No one else around here was a pyromaniac, although it seemed like he got his kicks from the explosion. Was there a word for that? Seemed like there should be. There was a word for everything else—and I was pulling from two languages.

Sure enough, an SUV parked further down the promenade was ablaze. Smoke was climbing that stairway to heaven. The blast had blown the windows out, and now the fire was using the space to poke its tongues out at the crowd starting to form.

“*Gamo tin putana*,” the third man muttered. “That’s my car!” He stormed off in the direction of the blast.

“Not anymore,” Baby Dimitri muttered. “Nobody can destroy a vehicle like Laki.”

I nodded to the retreating third guy. “Who is he?”

“Nobody you want to know,” the godfather told me.

In the distance, fire trucks wailed. And it seemed to me like there was a note of boredom in the sound. Laki blew up something again? Yawn. What a surprise.

Baby Dimitri seized my arm, dragged me inside his shop. Elias made a move but I stopped him. “It’s okay,” I told him. Or at least I thought it was. I’d find out eventually.

The godfather turned me to face him, held my shoulders. His face was serious, bordering on grim. “Listen to me, Katerina Makris-with-an-S. Stay away from the Germans. This could get you killed ... and I like you, even if you are not always the pointiest pencil on the desk.”

A second explosion struck. I hit the floor, arms over my head. Elias leaped through the open door. “It’s just another car. Those two American *vlakas* who have been following you.”

Baby Dimitri quirked an eyebrow in my direction.

“American cops,” I said. “They think I know something about something I know nothing about.”

He nodded like he knew. “That is always the way. Now get out of here ... and take my idiot nephew with you. Don’t come back for a while.”

If pushed to slap an adjective on it, I’d say he was scared. Normally Baby Dimitri didn’t come across as a man who knew fear intimately. Thoughts rolled through my head, bound up in loose bundles; tumbleweeds constructed from words, pictures, and the occasional

memory of something ridiculous I did years ago. One perfect comeback popped into my head, a pink soap bubble of a thing, five years too late. Thanks for nothing, brain.

I wandered out to where the American cops were watching their car burn.

"Huh," I said. "That's some bad luck."

Lopez scratched his head. He was sunburned and he smelled like the wrong end of a goat. Bishop wasn't faring much better. His sagging clothes were limp. That face of his looked sad enough to convert from hip-hop to country.

"Wasn't bad luck," Lopez said. "It was a demon. We saw him. He looked us right in the eyes." He pointed to his face with two fingers. "Right in the eyes. Didn't we, Gene?"

"Right in the eyes," Bishop confirmed.

"He had gold teeth and he wouldn't stop grinning. Then he threw a burning bottle into the fuckin' rental car. How the fuck am I gonna get the deposit back now? Look." Lopez pointed. "There he is. There's the demon. You can see him, right? Tell me you can see him."

It was Laki—of course. He sauntered up to me, grinning.

"They bothering you?"

"On and off," I said. "They're like fleas."

"I figured. I tried to smoke them out for you but here they are. They were following you. Creeps. Always somebody seems to be following you. Good thing you bring them to Laki." He winked and off he went, back to his favorite chair.

Not too far away, the third member of Baby Dimitri's posse was tapping frantically on his phone. He pressed the phone to his ear, then swaggered in the opposite direction, away from his burning vehicle. By the time the fire truck showed up, sirens mumbling, he was gone.

"I don't trust that one," Elias said. "I know a criminal when I see one."

"My whole family are criminals," I said.

"Yes, but there are levels. Your family has manners and class."

"Have you met Stavros and Takis?"

He shrugged. "Stavros cooked lunch for me the other day, then we watched a movie. He's an okay guy."

Stavros was shaping up to be one of my favorite family members. Under the criminal skin he was a good guy who enjoyed whipping up gourmet food. He'd swap the mob lifestyle for fatherhood in an instant if the right woman came along. Unfortunately, knowing Stavros, she was liable to be cloven footed.

"Did the movie have sheep or goats?"

He looked at me. "I don't think so. Why?"

"Just curious."

Back at the compound, the Family was winding down for the big nap, which should be mandatory anywhere the thermometer creeps over eighty degrees. Naps for all mankind. That was a cause I could get behind.

Elias wandered off to do whatever bodyguards do when they're not guarding bodies. Lift weights, trim his toenails, squash spiders. On the way through the courtyard, Donk got caught up with some of my teenage cousins. Maybe they could knock some of whatever he needed into him.

Aunt Rita must have been reading my mind—which was currently clamoring for food of the sugar-drenched kind—because we collided at Grandma's front gate.

"Food?" she said.

"Food."

She threaded her arm through mine and dragged me into the heap that was Grandma's home. I wandered through the tiny house, with its doglegged addition and checked the windows were open, the shutters were latched, and that there were no killers who weren't Family hiding under the beds. Back in the kitchen, Aunt Rita was grabbing plates and napkins.

"Oooh," she said, diving into the *koulourakia* container. "Mama's *koulourakia* are the best." She inspected it closely. "What are the green bits?"

We stared at it together.

"Spinach?" I guessed.

"Who puts spinach in *koulourakia*?"

"Back home we make pumpkin pie and zucchini bread."

"That is different. We make pumpkin pie with nuts and phyllo." Her nose wrinkled up. Her forehead didn't move. A second dose of Botox must have fallen off the back of the truck at last. Now her forehead was even, a wide, smooth expanse. "And we make it into preserves as a spoon sweet."

"We put it pumpkin-flavored syrup in coffee, too, in autumn."

"I don't know what is wrong with Americans. Very strange people."

I couldn't argue with that, so I grabbed my own *koulouraki* and began to chew. "Whatever it is, it tastes fine. Doesn't taste like spinach though."

There was a wolf whistle outside, and then the gate squeaked open. Papou rolled into the kitchen a moment later, yellowing eyes on the *koulourakia*. Aunt Rita and I stood there chewing for a moment.

"What kind of hostess are you?" he said. "Offer a man a *koulouraki*,

otherwise Zeus will strike you down.”

“Ask me, Zeus is a douche bag,” I said. “Most of the bad stuff in mythology happened because he couldn’t keep it in his pants.”

“‘Douche bag?’” Papou said. “What is ‘douche bag’? And hand over a koulouraki or I will feed you to my eagle.”

I grabbed a plate out of the cupboard, dropped a Greek cookie on it. “How is Yiorgos?”

“I think he is sick.” He snatched the plate out of my hand. “All he does is sit around, looking sad.”

“How can you tell? Don’t eagles have just one facial expression?”

He stared at me, chewing. “What do you know about eagles? Nothing, that is what.”

“What do you know about eagles?” I asked him.

“More than you because I have an eagle. What are these green bits? Did the old bat drop them in the garden?”

“Spinach,” I said. Then I giggled. Spinach in cookies was funny. Apparently Aunt Rita thought so, too, because she began giggling, too, only her giggle was filtered through an Adam’s apple, which made it sound like it had been raked over gravel and glass. I laughed harder.

“You sound like a man,” I said between outbursts.

“It’s the balls,” she said.

Papou’s gaze swung between us like a pendulum. “The Virgin Mary’s *mouni*, what is wrong with you two?”

“It’s not me,” I said, “It’s Aunt Rita. She sounds funny.”

He sniffed. “I was hoping one of you could help me, but I guess you are too busy eating.”

“Maybe you should get out of that chair and walk, you old *malakas*,” Aunt Rita said. She rocked back in her chair, cackling, while Papou flipped her off.

“What do you need help with?” I said. “Charm school?”

“You are lucky I cannot walk or I would walk over there and make you eat wood. You are not too old to spank. I need help with my eagle—what else?”

Aunt Rita made an attempt at wiggling her eyebrows, but the Botox wouldn’t let them move much. “Spanking can be fun, if it is not some dirty old man doing the spanking. My eyebrows aren’t moving, are they?”

I shook my head—very American of me. “Nope.”

We dissolved into a fresh round of giggles.

“Get me another *koulouraki*,” Papou barked. “These are good. Even better than Baboulas’s usual batch. Must be whatever these green bits are. Oregano? Basil?”

“Then they would taste like pizza.” Aunt Rita wrinkled her nose as much as she could. “They don’t taste like pizza.”

“Not pizza,” I agreed. “Maybe it’s some kind of Greek herb. What do Greeks grow?”

“In Mama’s garden?” My aunt helped herself to another cookie. “Could be anything. Maybe it’s nettles.”

“Nettles, really? Wouldn’t that sting?”

“I don’t know. What do I look like, a chef?”

If chefs dressed like a 1980’s Dolly Parton, then sure. “I guess not,” I said.

The gate squeaked again. This time Donk’s stick figure sloped through the yard. Baby Dimitri’s nephew had been born without manners, and he hadn’t picked any on his short journey through life. He flung the screen door open without knocking and helped himself to a chair.

“Duuuuude,” he said in the worst English ever. Which was all his English. He was the kind of kid who spray-painted *FACK* on an underpass, and pronounced it the same way. “Marijuana *koulourakia*.” Then he snatched one up, crammed it into his mouth.

What?

Slowly, it sank in. We were chowing down on Grandma’s version of pot brownies, but without the chocolatey goodness. Still, the *koulourakia* were pretty great ...

I leaped across the table, slapped it out of his mouth, slipped, crashed onto the floor, and rolled toward the door. The doorjamb leaped out to smack me on the forehead. It was the only thing preventing me from tumbling into the garden.

Nice doorjamb. Maybe I’d see about getting it some fresh paint.

I giggled. This was the most fun I’d had since Lopez mistook Laki for a demon.

Then I stopped. I was staring at boots. Big, heavy, military-style boots. My gaze traveled up a pair of long, muscular cargo-pants legs in the blackest shade of black their wearer could find. Maybe it was the pot, but the colors were richer. Outside, Grandma’s garden was something out of Wonderland.

“Uh-oh,” Aunt Rita said in a sad voice. “No more fun for us.”

My gaze snapped back to the legs and followed them all the way up to an acre of Xander’s chest. He was wearing a skintight black T-shirt and an expression that said he was considering putting this on YouTube. Only the potential wrath of Grandma was holding him back.

“Wow,” I said. “You’re really big.”

Aunt Rita slipped off her chair, shaking with fresh gales of laughter. Her platinum nest of curls lurched to one side but she didn’t seem to care.

“I’m not talking about that,” I said, digging a deeper hole. “I mean he’s big all over. Tall—I mean tall. And ... broad. Do you even have

body fat? I don't think this guy has body fat. How can you swim? Don't you just ... sink?"

He picked me up like I was preschooler and dumped me back on my chair. Then he relieved us all of our snacks, dropped them back in the container, and left.

With the container.

"That clown is the fun police," Papou said. Then he snickered. "I have an eagle. Who wants to see my eagle?"

"A real eagle?" Donk said.

"No, a fake one. It sits on my shoulder and says nothing because it's dead. Of course a real eagle. What kind of idiot brags about anything else?"

"Uh ..." Donk's expression was a mixture of uncertainty and alarm.

"I have been trying to teach him a trick. I lie down in a bathtub with mice and I wait for the eagle to cut my throat open with his talons to get to the mice."

All three of us gawked at him in horror.

"You ... get in the bath with mice?" my aunt said.

"What? I am doing the family a favor! Think how easy the cleanup will be when they find me. Spray, spray, rinse." He threw his hands in the air. "I am a prince. Who else would be so considerate? Everything I do is for the Family. And what do I get? Some clown in army boots steals the *koulouraki* right out of my hand."

"I can't laugh now," my aunt said. "My laugh-maker is broken. Thank you, old man for killing my laugh."

"Grandma made other desserts," I said.

"Bah! It's not the same," Papou said. "I like the green bits."

Between the time I closed my eyes and the time I opened them three hours later, the warm, fuzzy high had worn off. My tiny borrowed room was a fake kind of dark, thanks to the shutters. The heat was a dull toothache that I knew wouldn't quit until the sun fell down the other side of the sky. On the far side of the room—although far was a major exaggeration—the outline of the generously endowed statue Baby Dimitri had given me a few weeks ago was distinct. The Godfather of Hookers and Shoe Polish hadn't been himself this morning, which worried me. Everyone I'd met in Greece so far seemed steeped in confidence. They were who they were—take it or get out of Greece. They made no apologies for the way they were, good or bad. Now one of the pillars had turned out to be made of sand, not whatever Greek pillars were usually made of. Marble, I supposed.

The third guy, who was he? Someone who had Baby Dimitri over a

barrel? Whoever he was, the godfather had been zipped up tight until Laki lobbed his firebombs. Laki's idea or Baby Dimitri's—I really wanted to know. But not as much as I wanted to know the identity of that third guy.

Now that the head fog was lifting, I was cursing myself for not hauling my laptop to Greece. I had my phone, yeah, but it was a replacement phone, paid for by the Family. Even if I could trust Grandma—and I wasn't convinced yet that I could—there were small leaks, informants, people who might give away my secrets if I Googled the wrong thing and it showed up in records somewhere.

I sniffed my pits, declared them good enough, and then went back to the broom closet to find Melas.

"What news from under the heavens?" Melas said, his voice tinged with desperation. Being cooped up didn't suit him. Being cooped up and cut off from his precious police department suited him even less.

"No news, just heat." The drop in temperature below ground was bliss. I sighed, happy that my pores could take a break from all the sweating. "How goes it in the underworld, Hades?"

"There's only so much Solitaire one man can play. But I can think of some games for two."

"What about your friend?" I nodded to the far end of the short hallway.

"He won't come out. No fun playing poker with a guy when you can't see his face."

"What about charades?" I said it with a straight face.

He laughed, shook his head. "Let's discuss one of those games I want to play with you. It involves a pack of cards and you losing all your clothes while I enjoy the win."

"You do not want to play poker with me." I said it like a warning, hoping he'd think I was a poker rock star. Fact is, I was so bad at poker other players thought it was an act, right up until I fell facedown on the table, crying. Go Fish was more my style. Even that was risky if I was playing for money.

Melas saw right through my bluff. Grinned. "It's okay if you're bad at poker. Better than okay."

"I'm not here to play poker."

"Well you're not carrying food and you're not naked, so I'm guessing this is a business call."

I nodded, briefly outlined the morning's events, including the two burning cars. Melas shook his head slowly, barely contained amusement on his face.

"I don't know whether to laugh or be scared for you. I'm going to go with both."

"Both is good."

He leaned against the counter, folded his arms, boosting his biceps up to dangerous. "So what is it you want from me?"

"You still haven't shaved."

"Take off your clothes and I'll shave."

Yowza. "Who are Baby Dimitri's"—I hunted around for the phrase they used on *CSI* and *NCIS*—"known associates?"

He blew out a sigh. "What did he look like? Did anyone use his name or a nickname?"

"No names. Average height, average build. Shiny suit, so I knew he was a criminal."

Melas tilted his head. "Shiny suit?"

I explained my theory about suits with the criminal sheen and he laughed.

"You are something else," he said. "I have a suit like that. My mother bought it for me."

Of course she did. But I wasn't about to tell him his mother was part criminal and kept a box with tools of the torture trade. Kyria Mela scared me. A *Twin Peaks* moment flashed before my eyes, of her crouching at the end of my bed with a pair of pliers in her hand.

I was fresh out of witty comebacks, so I finished describing the third guy and waited for Melas's memory banks to spit out his identity. But Melas jerked his head up and went, *Tst*. "Impossible to say. He sounds like half the guys in the business. Hell, he sounds like half the guys in Greece and the Balkans. Accent?"

"Greek, I think. I'm not a native speaker, remember."

"You speak Greek with a mostly Greek accent."

"It's getting easier."

His face turned serious. "Do you like it here?"

Did I? Undecided. I liked things about Greece; others, I loved. But there was an over-abundance of lining, and it wasn't silver. Mostly it was bloody.

"When people aren't trying to kill me or people I like."

"That won't go away. Not in the business your family is in."

"I know." And I did. It was a harsh reality but it was the only one I had. The Family's luxurious compound, the nice cars, the private planes, the influence, those were all paid for with dirty money. And Grandma was planning to dump it all in my lap. If that happened, maybe I could turn the Family straight. Scrape off the filth and make this an honest business.

Maybe donkeys could strap on wings and fly.

"Just about everyone in the business is a known associate," Melas told me. "Organized crime in Greece is incestuous. Everyone knows everyone, does business with everyone, sooner or later. Even enemies do business. Sometimes business is how they became enemies. Who

your guy was ... I don't know. I can't even begin to guess. But Baby Dimitri gave you a hint; it's up to you if you want to follow it. I'd prefer it if you didn't, whatever Baboulas has you doing. She's a businesswoman—a good businesswoman—which means she's doing what is best for her business.”

I ignored the bit about Grandma, mostly because he was bumping up against my own reservations. I had never had anybody except Mom and Dad; after Mom died, it was Dad and me against those annoying religious proselytizers who came banging on the door. Then he vanished and I discovered a whole family I hadn't known existed. I wanted—maybe even needed—they to be on Team Kat. But what if they weren't. Who did I have then?

“He was tight-lipped about the Germany thing ... right up until the third man left.”

He nodded. “My guess is the guy has something to do with the Germans. And now I'm curious, too. But there's nothing I can do down here.”

“Can't you ... I don't know ... wear a disguise? I bet Aunt Rita's got something.”

His eyes narrowed. “Please be joking.”

I held up a thumb and finger, a half-inch apart. A centimeter, if we were talking metric system. “Maybe a bit. But a disguise isn't a bad idea.”

He made a face like he was considering the possibility. “Who can I trust up there?”

“Me. Your parents. Do you have a partner? Probably your partner. Unless you can't. About fifty percent of the time the partner turns out to be one of the bad guys.”

“No partner. I work with whoever when I need to.”

“Who are you closest to?”

“Pappas.”

“Police Sergeant Pappas? Big guy, wears a food stain right about here?” I pointed to my chest.

He laughed. “That's Pappas. The food isn't his fault, though. It's his wife. She likes to snack while she's doing the ironing. He doesn't have the heart or balls to get her to wash his clothes again, so he wears them.”

“Because he loves her? That's sweet ... even if it is messy.”

“Because he's scared of her. That's how Greek men are. We're scared of our women.”

“Greek women can be scary,” I said, thinking of his mother.

“It's not that. We can go to war, fight, take bullets, but the only thing that can really hurt us is the loss of a good woman. Guys don't handle losing love well. So we stay scared.”

“You don’t seem like a guy who is scared of anything.”

He hooked his finger in the neck of my dress, reeled me in until we were hip to hip. “I might be getting that way.” He lowered his lips to my forehead and stamped a warm kiss on my skin. A hundred butterflies began bashing each other in my stomach, battling for whatever it was butterflies battled for. An extra day on earth? Whatever, they were going at it *Fox in Socks* style, beetles battling beetles in a bottle. I was the bottle.

“*When tweedle beetles battle*,” I muttered.

“I’m not even going to pretend to understand.”

“I don’t think Seuss translates anyway. We’re the worst idea ever, you and me. It can’t happen.”

“Which is why it’s scary. If not for your family we could be perfect.”

I pulled back. “If not for your job we could be a great idea.”

He looked affronted. “My job? What’s wrong with my job?”

“Isn’t it obvious? You’re a policeman.”

“It’s a good job—an honorable job. And I have work when a lot of Greeks don’t.”

“You and me, we’re the Jets and the Sharks. And we can pretend we’re Tony and Maria but look what happened to them.”

His face was blank. “What are you talking about?”

“*West Side Story*.”

He tilted his chin up slowly. The down trip was even slower. He had no idea.

“It’s kind of a modern retelling of Romeo and Juliet—with dancing and singing.”

He winced. “Sounds terrible.”

“There’s a place for us,” I said. “And maybe a time. But it’s not now and it’s not Greece. Not while I’m a Capulet and you’re a Montague.”

“I don’t know what they are.” His face was moving into mystified territory.

“They’re us,” I said. “Now let’s go see Aunt Rita about a disguise.”

“Can’t,” he said.

“Then I’ll bring her down here.”

He let out a long, pained sigh. “I can’t wait.” But his face said he definitely could.

Aunt Rita clapped her hands together in one of those little girlish moves. “A disguise! I love disguises. Sometimes I put on a disguise and pretend to be a man.”

My mind boggled. "That's ... uh ... I bet you're good at it."

"My ex-wife insists on it when I visit my sons. Come, come. You want coffee?"

I'd never been in Aunt Rita's apartment before. What I had envisioned was something massive with a closet to rival Oprah's. A garish palace with a fading sort of glamor, a bit like my aunt herself. Instead, she had a modest apartment on the second floor. The only real decorations were dozens of framed photographs of her sons. On the shelves stood a picture of an attractive young man who bore an uncanny resemblance to Dad, alongside his bride. They wore *stefana*—wedding crowns, simple loops of flowers and ribbons—and while they were smiling for the camera, their eyes were the what-have-we-done kind of crazy.

Aunt Rita before she was Aunt Rita, alongside the former Kyria Makri.

"Thanks, but I'm fine." I gestured to the photo. "She's beautiful."

My aunt shrugged. "Then. Now ... she's still beautiful, the witch."

"I was talking about you," I said. "Look at those cheekbones."

"This is why you are my favorite niece."

"I'm your only niece."

"If I had fifty you would still be my favorite."

Funnily enough, I believed her. I wished I'd known her my whole life. And I hoped like hell that she was really, truly on my side and wouldn't stab me in the back ala Brutus.

"So what are we going to do with Melas?"

"It is too bad he won't let us dress him as a woman. I have an auburn wig ... oh-la-la ... he could be Jane Fonda in *Barbarella*, or Raquel Welch in everything. He has good bones for cross-dressing, at least in the face. The rest of him ... all man."

Didn't I know it. "So what are you thinking?"

Her ruby red lips curved upwards. Melas was going to hate this. Which meant I would love it.

Chapter 9

WE WERE in the dungeon looking Melas over. He wasn't smiling. I think I would have been worried if he was.

"You're lucky I'm the law," he said, "and we usually don't like killing people. All that paperwork ..."

"Come to the dark side," Aunt Rita said. "We don't have paperwork, but we do have Baboulas's special *koulourakia*. Well, we did, until Xander took them." She held out a jacket for him to shrug into. He winced. His side was still giving him trouble. Getting shot will do that.

"*Koulourakia*? What kind of *koulourakia*?"

"Moving on," I said quickly. "Those pants are really working for you."

"No, no, no." He straightened the jacket and made a face. "I want to hear about the *koulourakia*. Why didn't you bring me any of those?"

"I love leather pants on a man," my aunt said, changing the subject. "All men should wear them."

We considered that possibility for a moment, until we presumably struck the Takises and the Papous of the world.

"Ugh," we said at the same time.

Melas couldn't look much better, at least from the waist down. He had Captain America's butt and muscular, but not overgrown, legs. He ran regularly and it showed. The leather was just icing on the delicious cake. Above the hips is where it all went wrong—but that was the point. Or at least I thought it was. Aunt Rita had decked him out like a reject from an 80s hair band. Heavy on the eyeliner. (She couldn't help herself—men were just screaming for guyliner, she insisted.) A nest of straw-blond hair was hanging around his shoulders, waiting on a family of rats to show up and make themselves at home. The leather jacket had time traveled directly from whichever year shoulder pads had peaked, and they'd hauled a Van Halen T-shirt along with them. Actually, the T-shirt wasn't so bad. I had one just like it. I mean, who didn't like Van Halen?

Melas looked dubious. "The idea was to not attract attention."

"Forget it," Aunt Rita said. "Have you looked in a mirror ever? Put a sack over your head like a chicken and people will still look. You are too pretty. So we are forced to hide you in plain sight. People will still look, but now because you look like a weirdo."

He grinned. "I can't help it if the gods gave me a double helping of

good looks.”

I rolled my eyes so hard I almost sprained something. “I see they swapped that for your modesty.”

“This could all be yours,” he said.

I eyed the jacket, the hair, the eyeliner. “Not even if you put a bow on it.”

His grin spread. “You say that now, but you haven’t seen the bow.”

My aunt was fluffing Melas’s fake-o hair and backcombing in places. “Katerina if I were you I would wait until you see the bow. Then you can decide, eh?”

“Smart woman, your aunt,” Melas said.

She blew him a kiss.

Kindness was one of his best traits. If he thought my aunt was weird he never said so. He treated her how she wanted to be treated: like a lady.

“Only one problem with this outfit,” he said, “besides everything. I’m not sure I can sit in these pants.”

Aunt Rita had the perfect solution. “So do not sit. I have a leather mini skirt I never sit in. It’s for standing only, at parties and clubs. Not that I go to clubs so much anymore. Sit in leather or move too much and it stretches. Then it is ruined, unless you know a good tailor or seamstress who can sometimes redo the seams.”

“How am I supposed to get around?” Melas wanted to know.

“The farm has a truck, I am sure. You can lie in the back and Katerina can drive.”

“Christ,” Melas said. “I can’t believe I let you talk me into this.”

“I can’t believe it either,” I mumbled. And I couldn’t. He must really want to get to the bottom of this German counterfeiting business. Probably I’d go crazy too if I was hiding in Grandma’s dungeon, no matter how swanky the accommodations. “Are you ready?”

“No.”

I grabbed my cross body bag, threw the strap over my head and settled the bag on my hip. “Then let’s go.”

I needed an invisibility cloak. People were staring. Not at me—at the 80s freak show in the passenger seat. Melas shunned the truck, saying there was no way he’d lie in the back while I ferried him around, so we were in the Beetle. Originally he had squeaked his way into the driver’s seat but couldn’t work the peddles without working up to it. Finally, Aunt Rita had suggested she redo the outfit and put him in one of her dresses and maybe a little fuchsia lipstick. I’d never seen a

man move faster—and in skintight leather pants, too.

Now we were cruising along the promenade. We had a few minutes before the barriers—a collection of barrels and wooden structures—sealed off the ends of the waterfront road, but masses of people were still clogging the sidewalks, caught up in that twilight gap between day and night. Some were early for the nightly party. Others were pulling seaweed out of their swim bottoms and glowing like stop lights. Tourists never knew when to quit the sun. They staggered onto the trains, planes, and boats that carried them home, shedding skin, vowing they'd take it easier next time their vacations rolled around.

"They're looking at me, aren't they?" Melas was staring straight ahead, refusing to make eye contact with the crowd.

"Well, to be fair they haven't anything like you since the 80s. Some of them weren't even born then, so they've never seen anything like you except in photographs. You're probably on YouTube now. Definitely on Reddit."

"This is supposed to be a disguise."

"And it is," I said. "No one knows it's you. Which way?"

He might have looked dubious; it was hard to tell under the war paint. "Next right."

I followed his directions inland, to a steep, narrow street that had enough room for my car and maybe a bicycle or an underfed donkey to pass each other. The houses were sporting the common unfinished look, whether they were single, double or triple-storied.

"Why are there so many unfinished houses in Greece?"

"Lower taxes," Melas said. "As soon as a house is complete the property taxes shoot up, so most people avoid the expense by leaving something left undone."

Huh. Greeks had all kinds of creative ways of dodging taxes. In America we just formed our own religions and claimed non-profit status ... or became wildly wealthy so we could take advantage of loopholes. When I told Melas this he just stared at me and shook his head. I think we were too weird for him.

Police Sergeant Pappas' house was two-story, white bumpy stucco, with dull red shutters that looked recently painted. In a place where most houses were suffering from sunstroke, this one was downright perky. The yard was a tangle of potted plants and vine that clambered over everything like a pack of wild monkeys. It was straight out of *The Jungle Book*. Before I followed Melas into the yard I glanced around for tigers and bears singing about bare necessities.

Normally Greek protocol, at least in this part of the country, was to stand outside someone's gate and yell their name until they called you in or turned the hose on you. If you were family you could holler as

you walked through the yard to the door. If you made your way to the front door without making a sound, you were probably Romany and therefore undesirable company. The partially nomadic people sent small bundles of people—usually a woman or two and a flock of their cutest children—door-to-door, begging for money and spitting out curses if you shooed them away. I'd only witnessed the ritual from a distance; no one came begging at Grandma's place, unless they were begging for their life. Melas wasn't family and he wasn't Romany. He was a neon sign. Half the neighborhood poured into the street to gawk at the funny man. Greeks weren't big on discretion; and anyway, everyone else was doing it, so why not?

I didn't point any of this out to him. The force of his glare might blast me off my feet, and I'd already witnessed two explosions today. He stomped up to the screen door in ignorance. Better that way.

He rapped on the frame. "Pappas, you there?"

There was movement inside, then the police sergeant rolled in front of the open door like a massive boulder in search of lower ground and something to crush. His eyes were wide, his mouth hanging slowly open. He snapped it shut when a fly buzzed too close. Then a swat came out of nowhere and slapped that thing out of the sky, leaving a small black stain on the stucco.

"Melas? Is that you?"

Melas looked down at himself. "Oh yeah, it's my disguise." He hooked his thumb in my direction, dumping all the blame on me.

"How ... Why aren't you in the hospital?"

Melas glanced around. "Can we come in?"

"Sure, sure." Pappas stepped back, so we could file through. "You want coffee? Irini, coffee! Wait—have you met *Despinida* Makris?" he called out. "I remembered the S," he said to me.

"Just Katerina is fine," I said. It was a respect thing—and Greeks were big on respect, at least to your face, so they didn't look bad—but tacking on the Greek form of *Miss* made me feel like a spinster landowner in the 1800s.

His eyes went shifty, as though he was trying to figure out if I was pulling his leg, waiting for him to screw up so I could have someone in my family punch holes in him with bullets. His struggle was real.

"Just Katerina, I promise," I said.

"Uh ... yeah ... sure," he said vaguely.

A tiny blonde kewpie doll appeared at his elbow. Big, round green eyes. Lips the color of strawberry shower gel. She was twenty-something and one of the most adorable women I'd ever seen in person. I wanted to crawl into a dumpster, where I belonged.

This was the police sergeant's wife?

She came at me like a pretty bullet. "Katerina! I would know you

anywhere. I saw you in the newspaper and knew instantly we could be best friends, if ever we met.” There were hugs, there were continental kisses, and then there were more hugs of the anaconda kind. By the time she released me I felt like I’d been standing on a train in Tokyo for seven days straight. “I’m Irini,” she chirped. “You want coffee? You can have all you can drink.” She looked at Melas and sniffed. “I suppose you can have some, too.”

I raised an eyebrow at him and he shrugged. What was that all about? Usually women loved Melas. Even Grandma, who regularly threatened to cut off his limbs for standing too close to me, had never tried to kill him.

“We can’t stay,” Melas said.

Irini aimed a disappointed sniff in my direction.

“You want to explain to me why you’re not in the hospital?” Pappas said. “Don’t misunderstand—I’m glad. Really glad. But ... I don’t get it.”

Melas gave him the Cliff’s Notes. The police sergeant’s face was thoughtful, grim, the way it always was. I wasn’t sure he did smiling. When Melas was done the big guy clapped him on the padded shoulder.

“Whatever you need,” he said. “We will catch these *malakes*.”

“Pictures,” Melas said. “I need Katerina to identify the third man at Baby Dimitri’s shop.”

Pappas nodded. “Come see me tomorrow at work,” he said to me.

“Can’t you just ask him his name?” Irini Pappas said. “That’s what I do if I want to know who someone is.”

The men stared at her. They were this close to rolling their eyes. So I stepped in to prevent them from going patronizing cop on her for what was a reasonable question.

“We don’t know for sure which team Baby Dimitri is on or what his connection is to this man. Talking to the police, or me, might put him in a difficult position.”

I didn’t say deadly position, but that’s what I meant. If Baby Dimitri sang it could get him killed. One man was already dead. The lower the body count the better.

On the way back to the car, I verbally tackled Melas.

“What’s with you and Irini Pappas?”

“Nothing.”

“Nothing—ha. She really doesn’t like you. There has to be a reason.”

“No reason,” he said. “She’s crazy.”

“Crazy how?”

“She’s a woman.”

“Tell me you didn’t just call all women crazy.”

“All women are crazy, in their own way. They’re not like men.”

“Yes, they don’t lobotomize us at birth.”

“You know what I mean.”

“No ...”

“You’re complicated. Men are simple. When we’re angry with another man we fight and then it’s over. You women hold grudges forever.”

My stomach collapsed. “Oh boy, you dated her?”

“I dated her sister. We broke up. The end.”

Now things were getting less hazy. “Oh.”

“See? You’re acting weird now. That’s what I was trying to avoid.”

We got back in the Beetle. Melas took his time—he didn’t have much choice.

“I’m not acting weird.”

“Weird,” he said.

I fired up the engine, tapped the gas. The yellow bug lurched forward.

“I’m not in yet,” Melas said.

“Huh. Better hurry up then.”

“Weird,” he repeated. “Where now?”

There was one person I could ask about Baby Dimitri’s mystery man. We were sort of friends, in that she more or less tolerated me as long as I didn’t scare her customers away.

I tapped the gas again. Melas winced. He’d brought it on himself.

Penka was a Butterball turkey with a scrawny, sarcastic trailer-park beauty trapped inside the crispy skin. The Bulgarian dealer sold prescription drugs for Baby Dimitri, and she sold them from the stoop of a one-story house directly across from the beach. The house wasn’t hers, but I assumed the owner didn’t mind her peddling her wares on their front doorstep. Every so often the police hauled her in, but only to bounce her right back out again. It’s a ritual I suspected they both enjoyed.

Penka was in a strapless red dress this evening, and if I lifted a seashell to my ear I knew I’d hear it screaming. She dressed like an optimist wearing beer goggles. As a result, her seams were desperate. Probably somewhere, a wannabe rock star was organizing a protest concert to save her clothing from tyranny.

The Beetle snugged up to the curb, top down, windows retracted.

This time of the evening traffic was thinning out. Penka would be closing up shop for the day soon. Most of her clients had things like families and respectable jobs that kept them from cruising the beach at night for Ritalin. I got out and leaned against the car's flank. The leather pants trapped Melas inside.

Penka peered past me, to where Lopez and Bishop were parking, three empty spots down. "Assassins?"

"Cops."

"Worse." She eyed Melas. "What is this? I have not seen anything like this since a long time ago in Bulgaria."

"Just someone I found lying around."

"He smells like a cop."

Melas stared at her from inside the car. "What does a cop smell like?"

"Metal bars, lack of hope, one-ply toilet paper."

"I smell like all that?" he asked.

"Normally Greek cops smell like cheap coffee, too, but you smell like the good kind."

He opened his mouth, but I backhanded his arm. "Your boss is maybe mixed up with something bad," I told Penka.

She looked at me like I was missing most of my brain cells. "Are you joking? You must be joking. You know he is criminal."

"I know, I know. But I mean something worse than usual. Something German. You always know stuff."

"What do I look like—criminal? I am a drug dealer, not a criminal."

"Technically dealing drugs is a crime."

"I deal fancy drugs. Prescription. There are levels."

So I was finding out. "So you don't know anything about Germans?"

"They eat strange sausage and they drink beer. A lot of beer. Baby Dimitri will kick my ass if I talk to you about this."

"I won't tell him." I glanced at Melas. "You won't tell him, right?"

"Not a word."

I looked at Penka expectantly. She let out a big chest-rumbling sigh. It was a lot of chest. "All I know is that he does business with Germany, but I don't think he likes it. He tolerates them because he has to. Probably they have something on him."

"What would they have on him?"

"He is a criminal, could be anything. Pick a crime ... that is probably it. There is something strange about him lately. He came to me about a week ago and asked me to move some new drug. I told him no, I only do prescription drugs. This was something else."

"He was okay with that?"

"I am not his bitch. I am like consignment store: I choose what I sell. Penka has standards, yes she does. You come to me to buy ... I will give you something to help you concentrate, to give you energy, to make you sleep. High? Forget it. You go to other, cheap drug dealer who sells *sisa* or whatever this is Baby Dimitri wanted me to push."

"Do you know anything about counterfeit money?"

"Euros? You want counterfeit euros you come to the wrong country. The best forgers come from Italy. Everybody knows this."

"I did know," I admitted. "But only because the Internet said so. There was a third guy with Baby Dimitri and Laki today." I described him as best I could, including the part about the shady suit. "Any idea who that is?"

"Sounds like most Greeks," she said.

Melas said, "See?"

My phone made noises. Dreadful noises. The kind of noises I had nightmares about. It was possessed by a cacophony of sheep bells and thin whining that sounded like souls in hell howling for redemption. Rembetika. Some wretched, soon-to-be-dead-meat, son of a motherless goat had programmed my ringtone to play Greek folk music.

"I'm going to kill Xander," I said through gritted teeth, wrestling with the phone. I stabbed buttons, but it wouldn't stop.

"I'd pay money to see you try," Melas said. "Have you tried answering the thing?"

"Yes." No.

I pressed the green button to answer. "If this is Xander, I'm coming to kill you. If you feel a foot on your head while you're swimming, that's me. Or maybe I'll do it while you're sleeping, you Rembetika-loving swine."

There was silence. Too much of it. Then Grandma said, "What news, Katerina?"

"That swine Xander replaced my ringtone with Rembetika. I hate Rembetika."

"Which song?"

"*A fish, a fish, a fish, a fish.*"

"I love that one," she said. "And old one, but a good one from back when music did not sound like dogs barking. Did you get anything from the German?"

"He told me my Jeep was shit and gave me grief for not recycling one hundred percent of the time."

"You do not recycle? What is wrong with you?"

"Oh God, not you, too."

"You should recycle, Katerina. What else?"

"Nothing. He wouldn't talk. He looked scared though when I suggested the woman might come back and kill him."

“How is security there?”

“I don’t think he can get out.”

“Can anyone get in?”

I passed the message on to Melas, who shook his head. “Pappas stationed a guard in the room, 24/7.”

Grandma made an approving sound.

“Does Baby Dimitri have connections to Germany?” I asked her.

“Not that I know of. Why?”

I told her about the third man from the shop and she went silent.

“Any idea who he could be?”

“No. Only suspicions.”

“Are ... you going to tell me?”

“I have changed my mind. I want you to stay away from this. Just do whatever it is young women do—but do it with that bodyguard of yours close by.”

“I suppose I could see if Marika wants to go to the beach ...”

“No. Marika has children to care for. Take Rita with you, or Stavros. He needs more sun.”

“Don’t forget to tell Xander I’m going to murder him quietly in his sleep.”

She chuckled. “I will tell him, but I think you will have to wait in line. Many people already want to kill Xander.”

If he went around changing ringtones, he was bringing it on himself.

He and Melas had a lot in common.

I drove Melas back to the compound “Well, that’s that, as we say back home,” I said.

“You giving up?”

“Yes.”

He snorted.

“What?”

“Doesn’t sound like you.”

Quiet night in the courtyard. The family was socializing, but they were doing it elsewhere. In their apartments, at one waterfront or the other, and at Makria’s village square. Small nosegays of Grandma’s men were still here, keeping an eye out for trouble and other anomalies. As soon as we stepped foot in the courtyard the hyenas began to howl with laughter.

“What is that, Katerina?” one of the cousins said. “Bigfoot?”

Melas stood a shade under six-feet, but the hair added bulk and lift. I could see where they maybe mistook him for Bigfoot.

"Bigfoot," Melas muttered.

"Don't say anything," I said, "and let me handle it."

"Tell me how that's not supposed to worry me."

The pockets of light and shadow meant my eye-roll was wasted on him. I waved at the group of Grandma's men and kept walking.

"Hey, King Kong?"

Takis. And his Greek accent tacked on an unnecessary G, which meant Melas was now *Kingk Kongk*. No way would I laugh, even though it was funny. No way. No way ...

A snicker squeaked out of my throat.

Melas's head turned. "What was that?"

"Gas?"

"You laughed."

"Did not."

"You know what they say about payback."

"It's a man in leather pants and a big blond wig?"

Behind us, a chorus of wolf whistles started up. Takis yelled, "Katerina is going to show *Kingk Kongk* a good time. Then they are going to brush each other's hair and put on makeup together."

Marika's voice wafted out into the night. "No more *tiganites* for you."

"Okay, okay," Takis muttered.

I took Melas back to Grandma's yard. "We'll wait until they go inside, then I'll take you back to the dungeon."

He jerked his chin up. "You're off the case, but I've still got a job to do. Thing is, I can't do it in these pants."

"Your clothes are still in the dungeon."

"What I need are jeans and some other things, too."

"And they are ...?"

"At my house."

Melas owned a partially renovated firehouse on the outskirts of Volos. It still had the original rolling front door and a big pole up the middle, in case his dates wanted to make a fast getaway. My first week in Greece, he cuffed me to the pole and ate his mother's homemade moussaka in front of me, the monster. I'd had to call Aunt Rita to rescue me—which she did, Rambo-style. Ask me, Melas was still kind of butt-hurt that I'd picked the lock on his back door to get in.

"So ... you can borrow my car and go get them."

"Your car is yellow."

"I know. I love it."

"Bright yellow, like a canary. It screams, *Look at me.*"

"Grandma won't mind if you borrow something from the garage."

"I still can't go back to my house. I can't risk the wrong person

spotting me and figuring out I'm not in that hospital bed. I can do more if I stay low."

Was he dropping hints? No, Melas was male—males didn't do hints. They said it or they shut up. Mostly. But all my experience with men was of the American variety. For all I knew Greek men were stitched together differently.

"You could get Pappas to go."

"No, he's doing enough already. If someone is watching my place they'll know something is up if they see him there."

"Could be I know some people who know a thing or two about breaking and entering."

"Too bad that's not the least of their crimes," he said. "No, I'll have to do it myself. Go in the back way while it's still dark."

"Or," I said, "I could do it."

"Baboulas said—"

"Grandma says a lot of things and I listen to them all. But my obedience rate is below fifty percent. She knows that. She expects it." My nose wrinkled up. "Or she should, by now. Make a list and I'll go."

"And if people are following you?"

I shrugged. "I'll make it look like I'm snooping. It's not like I haven't done it before."

"Jesus," he said. "Don't remind me. I don't want to think about you in those cuffs while I'm wearing these pants."

I couldn't help myself: I glanced down. Melas was a man with nowhere to go, in more ways than one.

Chapter 10

AN HOUR LATER, I was at Melas's backdoor with his key. The lock, he'd told me, was new. After I broke in, he'd had a locksmith install something that couldn't be picked with the help of a YouTube video. I didn't tell him there was a YouTube video for everything, even his new lock.

I slipped through his door alone, but I had backup. Elias was outside in the shadows, watching for watchers. He'd already spotted Lopez and Bishop in an old Renault that was one fender-bender away from the great scrap heap in the sky. Either they didn't care about being seen, or the Renault had died in the puddle of light from a nearby streetlight. I knew they were there. And they knew that I knew. And I knew that. Any minute now I expected Elton John to start singing about the circle of life.

Flashlight on. List out.

The first thing listed were Melas's clothes. I climbed the metal staircase to the combination bedroom and office, taking a detour via a circuit of the downstairs. Top and bottom floor were both open floor plans, with separate rooms only for the laundry and bathroom. I knew this because I yanked open the doors one by one and peeked inside. For a guy, he was tidy and clean ... or his mother swung by a couple of times a week with the vacuum cleaner. He was a Greek son—it was probable that mommy did his housework.

I located his jeans and shirt immediately, stuffed them into my bag. Then I grabbed the next item on the list, his laptop. That went into my bag, too, buffered by his jeans. The rest of the items were small. A thumb drive from the top desk drawer. Clean underwear (boxer briefs). Razor. Shaving cream.

A shadow crept across the wall, backlit by a half-assed moon. There was no time to gasp, run, or hit the deck and crawl away, because two things happened simultaneously. The floorboards squeaked behind me, and a hand clamped over my mouth. My bladder began to negotiate with the muscles holding it shut and I didn't like where their conversation was going. Desperate times called for desperate measures—I licked the hand. Its owner recoiled and said, "Did you just lick me?"

It was Melas.

"Melas?" I hissed, whipping around to face him. "What's wrong with you?"

Melas slapped on his best grin, wiped his hand on my cheek. "This is yours, you can have it back. I like being licked, but not on the hand. Want me to show you where?"

Unbelievable ... yet believable. "Have you been taking social graces lessons from Takis?"

"Can't blame a man for trying. Did you get everything?"

I nodded. "What are you doing here?"

"Wanted to see if anyone is watching the place. And I was worried about you."

"The two American cops are out there."

"Saw them. Are they bold or stupid?"

"I don't think they care. They want me to know they're following me around."

"They came a long way. Why are they tailing you?"

I gave it to him in bullet form and tacked on disclaimer. "But really I don't know what their problem is. I don't know anything, and Dad wasn't home to know anything either."

"American vice cops in Greece. Does Baboulas have business in your home city?"

"Not that I know of. But then I don't know a lot," I admitted. Melas was looking out the window. "See something?"

"Nothing. Doesn't mean they're not there, but maybe I got lucky." He yanked open his freestanding closet, pulled out a backpack. Then he helped himself to the contents of my bag. Okay, so they were his things, but still ...

I stood there open-mouthed.

"Better this way," he said. "I can go underground without involving you or your family."

"But—"

He grabbed my hand, pulled me closer. The hand that wasn't holding mine curled around the back of my neck. "Soon," he said. Then his lips brushed heat on mine. A moment later I heard the soft click of a window closing. Melas was gone.

I padded down the stairs, went out the way I'd come in, locking the door behind me.

Elias stepped out of the shadows. "How did it go, boss?"

"Did you see anyone else?"

"Is this a performance review?"

"What? No. I just want to know if you saw anyone besides those buffoons across the street."

He paused. "I don't know if I should say."

I stared at him.

He sighed. "Okay. Detective Melas went in through the roof, then he came out a few minutes later through a window. Are you sure this

isn't a performance review?"

"Yes."

"Yes, you're sure, or yes, this isn't a performance review?"

When did things get so complicated? "It was just a question."

He relaxed. Then: "If it was a performance review, how did I do?"

"Elias," I said, scanning the curb down the street from the former firehouse. We had left the Beetle in the garage and chosen something more sedate. The black Toyota had been five sheep away from a good nap. "Forget about the performance review. Where's the car?"

Shrug. "Melas took it."

"You're telling me a ... *policeman* stole our ride?"

"I figured it was police business so I didn't stop him."

I slapped my forehead. "Ungh. How are we supposed to get back up the mountain?"

"We could get another car."

"You mean steal one?"

"Is it stealing or borrowing if we give it back when we're done with it?"

"In Greece I think it depends on whether you gas it up or not before you give it back." Greece's gasoline taxes were on par with Super Bowl ticket prices. Okay, an exaggeration, but not by much.

Elias jogged across the street to where the Renault was slowly rusting in peace. He crouched down beside the driver's side window, mouth moving slowly, hands waving frantically as he tried to do English the Greek way. Finally, he stood up and jogged back over. The Renault's lights came on, and Lopez rolled the dying beast to stop at the curb beside us.

"I heard you need a ride." His forehead wrinkled up like a paper bag. "At least I think that's what your pal was saying."

"Someone borrowed ours. We could use a ride to Grandma's house or a taxi stand."

Lopez turned to his partner, who was retying his do-rag. "What do you think, should we help out a damsel in distress?"

"She don't look too distressed."

"Let's go," I told Elias. "We're walking."

"Sure thing, boss," he said, completely without sarcasm or mockery. That was mildly disturbing. I'd never been the boss of anything before. We took off on foot in what I remembered as being the right direction. A quick check of my phone's GPS said my inner navigator wasn't as hopeless as I thought. Slowly, I was getting used to Greece, or at least its not-that-mean streets.

Behind us, the Renault did a slow U-turn. The tie rods groaned. Something under the hood whined. Total failure was imminent. Lopez nudged the piece of crap until it was pacing us.

“Jesus H. Christ,” Lopez muttered over the top of Bishop. “Get in the fuckin’ car.”

I ignored him. Which would have been easy if not for the constant growling and gagging from the engine. I could have called someone for a ride—Marika, Stavros, Takis—but Grandma had told me to stand down and do girl stuff. Her people would be the first to rat on me. Well, Takis would. Stavros would keep my secret right up until someone threatened to steal his precious hoard of white truffles. Marika ... she wouldn’t blab on purpose. But accidents had a way of happening when her mouth was involved. She’d doom me with the best of intentions.

There was no one else. Apart from family, I was friendless in Greece. It wasn’t much better at home, to be a realist about the situation. My old group of friends had drifted away. We were living our own separate lives, raising children, working forty-plus hours per week, avoiding serial killers and mobsters in Greece. A bittersweet feeling settled over me—more bitter than sweet.

No ... that taste in my mouth was exhaust fumes. The Renault was singlehandedly turning this street into a miniature Beijing.

I stopped and turned to face Portland’s least finest. “Could you scam? This was a decent neighborhood until you wheeled that beast in here.”

Lopez made a face. “Couldn’t lease anything else, could we? Not after your pal blew up the other one. Anywhere else he’d be in a cell right now on terrorism charges. But you freaks treat him like he’s a valued member of the community. What’s up with that? Even the firefighters and cops didn’t blink when we pointed him out.”

I laughed, shook my head. “Do you know what that shoe and souvenir shop is?”

He shrugged behind the wheel. “I know I wouldn’t buy shit there. The place is a dump.”

“The man who owns it is a mobster. The guy who blew up your car is one of his ...” I wasn’t sure what Laki was, exactly. “... Let’s go with ‘buddies’. Law enforcement isn’t going to touch him.”

“Why the fuck not?”

“Did the cops march up and arrest Al Capone? They had to get him on tax evasion. Thing is, in Greece everyone evades taxes. It’s the national sport. So they can’t get them that way.”

“Fuckin’ mob,” he said. “They’re everywhere—even here. Who knew?”

A loud, clanging voice in my head said he didn’t know—about me, about Dad, about Grandma and the Family. So what was the Portland Bureau’s angle?

“I think Laki gets his kicks blowing up cars, not hurting people.”

Which may or may not be true, but it seemed true enough.

"Yeah, and now we're driving around in this piece of shit 'cause no one will loan us anything better."

I looked the rattrap over. "Suits you guys."

"You're mouthy," Lopez said. "A lot mouthier here than you were stateside."

Was that true? Probably. Going back home, I'd felt the anonymity creep over me like Harry Potter's invisibility cloak. I was just a regular American, doing regular American stuff. Okay, getting my grandmother's henchman to stash a body somewhere far, far away wasn't exactly regular, but at home nobody knew who my family was—or cared. Greece was small. Even with the influx of immigrants—refugees, illegal immigrants, legal immigrants, and Russians—Greece was still the size of Ohio in terms of warm bodies. Grandma was a regular fixture in the newspapers, and now they were flashing my face around, too.

"It's late," I said. "I'm tired. Now *fack* off, as the local graffiti says. I'm going home."

"Thought America was your home. You don't sound too patriotic."

I grabbed my hair, pulled. "Christ on a canoe, if we get in the car will you shut up?"

"Naw, homes," Bishop said. "But the talking will be over quicker."

"I wouldn't bother with a canoe if I could walk on water," Lopez said.

"Canoeing is the bomb," his partner said. "You ever been?"

"When?" Lopez raised both hands off the wheel. "Who has time? I don't got time."

"You need to chill, man," Bishop said, bobbing his head to an inaudible beat. "Get yourself a canoe and take it down to the Columbia."

"Sure. As soon as I retire, that's what I'll do."

Bishop shook his head. "You know what you are? You a pessimist."

I got into the car. Elias angled in next to me. We would have buckled up but there weren't any belts to buckle. This heap predated auto safety. The Renault coughed and spluttered as Lopez pulled away from the curb. Smoke chuffed out of the tailpipe. Someone in the neighborhood yelled, "*Ai sto dialo. Sou xezo!*"

Elias and I snickered in the backseat.

Lopez glanced back, suspicious. "What did they say?"

"They want to crap on you and send you to the devil."

"Kinky," Bishop said.

"Kinky, my ass," Lopez said. "That's nasty, that's what that is. And not in a good way."

"Greeks fling insults the way other people breathe," I told him.

"It's what they do."

"I can't wait to get back to America. We're crazy, but we're not this level of crazy."

"So go," I said.

"Can't. See, we think you and your daddy got something to do with our dead guy."

"Check with Homeland Security. I wasn't in the country."

Lopez shook his head. "We did that already. Checks out. But we still think you know something."

"And where's your old man?" Bishop said. "We ain't seen him for a long time now."

" 'For a long time'? What does that mean?" I asked.

"Could be we know Mike. Could be we know him real well," Lopez said.

"Not that well," Bishop said.

"Well enough," the Latino pumpkin said. "For our purposes."

I considered strangling them so they'd stop running me round in circles. "What purposes are those?"

Lopez tapped the phone in his hand. "Hey, we go left or right up here?"

"Left," I said. We were almost at the mountain road. If this piece of crap made it up to the compound without dying or careening over the edge, maybe I'd help them out as much as I could. If I gave them something maybe they'd pony up some more information. Questions were piling up. I wasn't a fan of questions unless I could easily Google the answer. Documentaries with commercials drove me crazy. Would the lion eat tonight? Could an organism really turn ants into zombie slaves? What if Lincoln had decided against the theater that night? All those questions would be answered ... after the commercials. Right now I was trapped in an endless commercial break. To skip the ads I might have to get up and snatch the remote.

I leaned back in the seat and closed my eyes.

The Renault didn't die, and before long I heard the now-familiar crunch of vulcanized rubber rolling over Grandma's long pebbled driveway.

"You can let us out here," I said, waving a hand at the guardhouse. The security guard was watching the Renault hard. I knew there was a red button near his hand that would set enough sirens off to blast the whole Family out their beds and probably wake up my dead grandfather in his oil can. I also knew he had serious firepower within arm's reach. He could vaporize the hunk o' junk and its passengers. But he wouldn't do it unless provoked, because otherwise the police would have questions. Still, better to be safe than sorry. I stuck my head out the window and waved.

The guard relaxed. "Katerina!" He took in the rustmobile, made a face. "I thought you left in a real car. Who is driving this thing?"

"A couple of American cops. They don't speak a word of Greek, except maybe souvlaki, Socrates, and Sparta."

"This is Sparta," Lopez said, seizing on the one word he understood.

"See?" I told the guard, who was, in some loosely connected way, a cousin.

"That was a good movie," the guard said.

Elias came around and opened my door. Unnecessary but sweet—although I thought he was still fretting over performance reviews. I didn't think Grandma did performance reviews. Either you did okay or you screwed up and she killed you.

"Hey." Lopez stuck his head out the window. "You not gonna invite us in?"

"Nope."

"I thought we was getting to be friends."

"You gave us a ride, that's all. We're just not that into you."

Soft laughter dusted the night. It was coming from the other side of the gate. Somewhere in the shadows, Xander was lurking. And where there was Xander there was usually Grandma. Maybe not here in the dark, but probably in the compound somewhere.

"What is this place?" Lopez squinted through the windshield. "Looks like some kind of palace. Didn't know Greece had palaces and mansions and whatnot. Figured it was all resorts and shacks."

"Greece used to have a king."

"Greece still has a king." Grandma's voice cut through the night like a machete. Accented English with a hint of contempt. "He was gone for a long time, but now he is back. He lives in Portocheli now." The smaller gate for foot traffic opened, and out came Grandma, with Xander lurking behind her like a second wall. Maybe it was the night, but she looked like someone had sat on her head and squashed her down a couple more inches—and the woman didn't have a lot of height to begin with.

Lights flashed in my head. Some of them even stayed on. The pot cookies. The cookies were for her, to help the nausea after chemo. That was the business that took her away today. And Aunt Rita, Papou, and I had almost gorged on her treatment—although to be fair, at first we didn't know. Drugs had never been my thing. When the doobie passed by I always waved it on without inhaling.

"Grandma," I said. "You're back."

She switched back to Greek. "It is late. Where were you?"

I could have told her the truth, but I didn't want her to worry ... or chop off my head for insubordination. So I made something up. "You

told me to do what girls do. So I did.” I winced on the inside. That was the best I could come up with? I really needed to work on my excuses. “We were in Volos.” That part was true.

“What are these two doing here?”

“Human sacrifice?”

Xander snorted behind her.

Her attention shifted back to the two baboons in the Renault. “Last time I saw them they were in a better car. What happened?”

“Laki.”

Lopez’s neck was getting a workout as he bounced back and forth between Grandma and me. “Lucky? Is someone getting lucky?”

“Excellent,” Bishop said.

Hands on the car door, I peered through the open window. “Shut up, Ted.”

“Whoa,” he said in a dumb voice.

Grandma wasn’t done with me. “Katerina?”

“You know I’m an adult, right?”

“Where is your car?”

“In the garage.”

“The other car. The one you took tonight.”

“A friend borrowed it.” I wasn’t about to say the M name, not with other people in earshot. She stared at me with the intensity of an x-ray for a moment, then flicked off the switch.

“Okay. I am going to bed now. Say goodnight to your friends.” She shuffled up to the car, peered inside. “Tomorrow I am making a big party. You should come, both of you.”

“That’s real decent of you,” Lopez said. “Should we bring anything?”

“Leave the gun,” I said. “Bring the cannoli.” Everyone looked at me. “What? Cannoli is delicious.”

“Yeah, cannoli is pretty good stuff,” Lopez agreed. He looked like he knew.

Chapter 11

GRANDMA WAS one of those people who hustled effortlessly. Me, if I hustled I wound up out of breath. Grandma hustled all the way back to her shack before turning on me with her pointy finger.

“What did I say?”

“Which time?” I asked. “Because that makes a difference.”

“The most recent thing.”

“ ‘What did I say?’ ”

“What? Are you on the drugs, Katerina?”

My joke had flown right over her head and crash landed in the baklava. I let out a big, dramatic sigh. “You told me to leave the German thing alone.”

“Good news: your memory is excellent. Your ability to follow an order is where it becomes a big problem.”

“I can follow orders,” I said, helping myself to a piece of baklava at the end of the row. What could I say; it looked lonely stuck out there on the edge. “I just didn’t want to.”

“Because Melas shook his *poutsas* at you?”

The mental image of Melas waving his dong in the air was a disturbing mixture of appealing and comical.

“Technically, I was the one doing the shaking.” She opened her mouth to issue a hit on Melas’s life. “Not shaking *that*,” I said. “I was curious about the guy at Baby Dimitri’s. After I mentioned it to Melas, he got curious, too. Then it sort of snowballed from there. Next thing I knew, Melas was 1980’s Bret Michaels and I was driving him around town while he tried not to split Aunt Rita’s leather pants. Then I broke into his house. With his permission,” I added quickly. “Then Melas showed up and took the car. But lucky for me, the two amigos were following me, so Elias and I didn’t have to walk back here.”

“I will have to speak to Elias about putting you at risk. He should have made them get out of the car.”

“You mean carjack them?”

She made a face. “If that is what you want to call it.”

“Hey, I’m not the one calling it that—it’s definition of carjacking. And I couldn’t. They would have been stuck in a foreign country without a vehicle or any clue where they were. I’m not that mean, even to them.”

“If they have a phone then they are not lost. GPS is magic.”

Damn Grandma and her impeccable logic.

“So, those *koulourakia* were tasty.” I squinted at her. “Weren’t they?”

“Are you trying to change the subject?”

“Yes.”

“Xander told me you ate them.”

“Yeah, before we knew what they were. I thought it was spinach.”

“Who puts spinach in *koulourakia*?”

“Papou thought it might be oregano.”

“Virgin Mary,” she said, rolling her eyes at the ceiling. “Papou ate them, too?”

“They were good. Everybody likes stuff that’s good. Maybe you should bake some things that aren’t good next time.”

She looked at me like I’d lost my mind. Maybe I had. Could be I was just tired. Jumping time zones made me loopy.

“Stay away from Baby Dimitri and his friends, Katerina.”

“Okay,” I said. “Melas is on it. And I’ve got my own problems anyway.”

“What problems?”

“The Portland Police Bureau rejects, for one, and my missing father. You haven’t forgotten about him, have you?”

“I forget nothing. Do not make the mistake of assuming that just because you cannot see it, nothing is happening. The Makris Family is big, powerful, and I have people everywhere. I am doing everything to find Michail.”

“Did you have chemo?”

I threw it out there, onto the plastic tablecloth. The truth wriggled around for a moment, while we twitched uncomfortably.

Finally, Grandma said, “Yes.”

“You could have told me—about the cancer and the chemo.”

“Most days I lie to myself and say I am not sick. My plan was to be immortal. I have not planned for death as much as I would have liked.”

“That’s everyone, I think,” I said. “Nobody really expects it to happen to them. They might say they do, but they don’t. Mom was sure she’d beat it right up until the end.”

“The chemotherapy is a recent decision. At first I was not planning to have it.”

“Why not?”

“I thought your father would be here to take over. I believed he would change his mind and come home.”

“Maybe if you’d told him you were sick ...”

“He knew.”

Gears clicked in my head. “When did he know?”

“Not long before you came to us.”

I didn't come to them; Takis and Stavros drugged and abducted me. I'd woken up mid-flight on Grandma's plane with no real luggage and my handbag stuffed full of tampons.

"Now you're having chemo so you can live longer and groom a different successor?"

"I am having the chemotherapy so maybe I can live longer and spend some time with my only granddaughter ... and hopefully convince her to take over the family business when I leave for my private island to enjoy my immortality in peace."

"And Dad?"

"If he is alive I will find him."

"He's alive. I'd know if he was dead."

Grandma had put all her energy into the bustling. When she lowered herself on the chair, it was with the caution of a woman about to sit on a dozen eggs. "I think I would, too."

"I'm not taking over when you die."

"You say that now, but you will."

"How do you know?"

"Because I used to be you."

Looking at her, that seemed impossible. I had trouble squashing spiders; she slaughtered grown men for breakfast, and also possibly ate them. That last part may or may not have been true.

"Aren't you going to ask me how I knew? About the cancer, I mean."

"Katerina my love, you have seen all this before. I would have been surprised if you had not recognized what was happening."

Elbows on the table, I buried my head in my hands. *Deja vu* was slapping me all over the place. "What kind of cancer and how long did they give you?"

"Ovarian. They took them out not too long ago, but ... the doctor says maybe fifty-fifty percent chance I will still be here in five years if the chemotherapy works."

If it did. In five years Grandma would be pushing eighty. Or maybe inching toward ninety. I wasn't sure how old she was. What I knew about my family wouldn't fill a Wikipedia page.

Grandma stood. She came around to my side of the table, dropped a kiss into my hair. "Get some sleep, eh? We will talk more tomorrow."

I sat at the table for a long time, worrying about the future and the people who would or wouldn't be in it. The way things were going, I wasn't sure I had a future. Being part of the Family attracted a certain criminal element. Like attracting like.

Company—I needed company.

And I needed to be alone.

I got up, laid two napkins on the counter, and sat a diamond-shaped piece of baklava on each. Then I carried them across the courtyard to Xander's ground floor apartment. I put my ear to the door and listened. Silence. Probably he was sleeping. I shouldn't disturb him, right?

On the other hand, I'd brought baklava. Who minds being woken up if there's baklava involved? I'd be at least eighty percent happier about waking up in the morning if there was pastry instead of an alarm clock sitting on my bedside table.

I was juggling the baklava, freeing up a hand to knock when someone tapped my shoulder. I jumped. The baklava tumbled to its death, but Xander's hand caught it inches from the ground.

"Jeez!" I said. "How about some warning next time? I know you don't talk, but how about footsteps or ... or ... one of those bells they put on goats and sheep? Nice save, by the way. Although I wouldn't have dropped it if you said 'hello' like a normal person."

He shrugged. The man was part panther, I swear. He'd snuck up behind me without the slightest whisper of sound, and he'd done it in slip-on sandals and wet swim shorts. I tried not to look down, but the view straight ahead was just as dangerous. My eyes landed on his pecs, with nothing surrounding them but acres of smooth, bronze skin.

"Baklava?" I squeaked.

He dumped both pieces in my hands.

"No, I brought it for you. Like an offering so you wouldn't be mad if I woke you up. I didn't even spit on it, although I should have for the ringtone incident."

He snorted, pushed his door open, grabbed my shoulders and steered me inside.

Xander looked like the kind of guy whose apartment saw a lot of female traffic. The bedding was black and slinky; the decor was calm and masculine. Neat. Tidy. Everything in its place and a place for everything. Big TV. New, expensive computer. Women would like coming here. I liked coming here; it smelled like Xander, and Xander smelled good. But then so did Melas.

He grabbed a couple of plates out of the cupboard, handed me two glasses, then vanished into his bedroom.

I could take a hint. The baklava went on the plates. I filled the glasses from the cold-water jug in the refrigerator. Speaking of refrigerators, Xander's was free of beer, soda, and condiments. And food ... there was no food. None. Just water. Which further increased my suspicions that he was some kind of robot.

When Xander came back, it was in loose shorts and a tank top that did his upper body all kinds of favors, but did me none—although my surging hormones had other plans. I said, as tactfully as possible, "Are

you a robot?"

He tipped back his head and laughed.

Did robots laugh? Probably, if they were programmed to.

"I guess that's a Yes."

Silence. Neither a denial or a confirmation. He cracked the phyllo pastry with the edge of his fork. I did the same and didn't speak again until there was nothing left but a dusting of crumbs and a smear of syrup on my plate. If I were alone, I'd lick it. Not Xander, though. He'd wash his plate and set in the rack to dry. Was he ever anything less than perfect?

Besides the crappy taste in music, that is. As far as flaws went, Rembetika was a big one.

I gathered up our plates and forks, washed them, sat everything in the rack to dry. "Grandma wants me to drop the Germany thing, but I don't think I can. My gut is telling me the Germans have something to do with Dad."

I wiped my hands on the dishtowel, hung it back on its hook to air dry.

Then I went to bed—my bed.

I woke up to the glorious sound of vomiting. Instantly, I was catapulted back in time to Mom's chemo days. I leaped out of bed and bolted to the bathroom to find Grandma hurling into the sink. I grabbed a face towel, rinsed it in cool water and lifted her tangle of hair. I laid the towel over her neck, and then tackled the business of her hairdo.

"This is going to start falling out soon, but in the meantime, let me redo this bun for you."

She stood still as I eased the band loose and braided her hair into a thick graying column. When I was done, I went to the kitchen and brought back a glass of cold water and watched while she took small sips.

Grandma looked down at my bare feet. "Katerina, my love," she said. "Where are your shoes?"

I'd seen airplanes flying lower than Grandma. Her soft, dopey smile was out of place with her widow's black. Usually you could cut yourself on any Greek woman of a certain age. Not this version of Grandma. The only thing she could shred with her tongue was water. She was sitting under the arch in a pile of dogs.

“Ha-ha,” she said, when two hounds made a move on her lips at the same time. “That was the best kiss I have had in years.”

“Mama,” Aunt Rita said, shooting nervous glances at the driveway, “the guests are arriving.”

“So let them arrive. I am going to sit here and cuddle with the cute puppies.” She grabbed a happy looking lurcher. “Who is a cute little puppy dog? You are.”

The compound’s cats were stationed nearby, waiting on their share of the love. Grandma never paid them attention—either she wasn’t a pet person or she didn’t have time for animals—so they wanted to get some while the getting was good. Then they could all go back to ignoring each other.

Behind us in the courtyard, the family had assembled chairs, tables, and a stage for the band—all family. Since dawn, the menfolk had been spinning dead livestock over hot coals. As always, I tried not to make eye contact with lunch on the way past. One of the long steel spits was covered in sizzling *kokoretsi*, the best-smelling worst thing ever. *Kokoretsi* was made of the bits no one but dogs normally ate because they didn’t know any better. But somehow, tying the hearts, lungs, kidneys, livers, and God knows what else onto the metal spit with sheep guts, and then slow cooking the conglomerate over glowing coals, transformed the offal into a delicacy. I’d eat it on purpose the day I lost my mind and woke up thinking Sardinian maggot cheese sounded tasty.

“Katerina ...” Aunt Rita tilted her head at Grandma. “Help me pick her up.”

My aunt’s dress was a plain fuchsia sheath that seemed conservative until she turned her back on you. Then you got an eyeful of bare skin that was plunging dangerously into crack territory. The wig was red, the style was Marie Antoinette, before she lost her head. Fake birds perched on real twigs. Things sparkled and flashed. My aunt was someone to be avoided if you had epilepsy.

I eyed Grandma. “I don’t know, she’s having fun. When was the last time she had fun?”

“Mama does not do fun things. She does gardening, cooking, and business.”

“Exactly.”

We stood there for a few minutes, watching the head of Greece’s biggest crime syndicate play with dogs. People who weren’t family—or Family—began to trickle between the gates. Because some of them were enemies as well as friends, nobody who wasn’t blood was allowed to park on the grounds. Their vehicles were confined to the far side of the gates, under the shade of the olive and fruit trees.

“In case of bombs,” Aunt Rita told me.

“Are your kids coming?”

“Not today. Maybe another time.”

That didn't seem fair, but what did I know? I was new—to Greece and my own family. There were dynamics and nuances I didn't understand yet. Maybe I never would. My parents had done their best to prepare me for life, but they hadn't prepared me for this.

But that wasn't entirely true, was it? I spoke Greek, thanks to Mom's pushing. I'd met Grandma as a child, also thanks to my mother. If I couldn't remember that, what else couldn't I remember? Were there signs and omens that I'd missed, stories I'd forgotten?

“Hey! Katerina Makris, we're here!”

Oh jeez, it was Lopez and Bishop, and they had dressed pretty for the occasion. Lopez had wrapped his upper half in a Hawaiian shirt that expanded the fiftieth state until, finally, something was bigger than Texas. He was in khaki chinos with a top button that was destined for a major case of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. Bishop was pretending to be cool in his backwards cap and slouchy pants. Unfortunately, his definition of cool had experienced severe global warming since the early 90s. Vanilla Ice melted years ago.

“Ha-ha,” Grandma said. “Ha-ha-ha. Your friends look funny.”

“Not my friends,” I muttered.

“Why is the fat one dressed like an island? Ask him if he has any coconuts. Never mind, I will ask him myself.” She switched to English, asked Lopez if he had any coconuts.

Lopez scratched his head. He was staring at Aunt Rita. I couldn't blame him. She was like a beautiful, deadly accident. “Didn't know we was expected to bring a gift. Did you?” he said to Bishop. Bishop shook his head.

Grandma cackled harder. The dogs took this as a sign of encouragement and continued their adorable onslaught.

“On second thought,” I whispered to my Aunt, “maybe we should get her up and out of here. She might undo decades worth of peace treaties or whatever it is she calls her business deals.”

“I will get Xander.” Aunt Rita stalked off, leaving me with Grandma and the two mismatched amigos.

“The food is that way.” I gestured toward the courtyard. “Help yourselves.”

“Hey now,” Lopez said, shoving his hands into his pockets. “This is a foreign country and we don't know nobody here. You should introduce us around, maybe be our interpreter. What if we eat something weird? I don't like weird food.”

“I don't like no weird food,” Bishop echoed.

“Yeah, you look like a Dollar Menu guy,” I said.

Bishop grimaced. “Shiiiiit ... you seen it lately? Everything is more

than a dollar. What's up with that?"

"Except the fries," Lopez said. "The fries are still a buck. So you gonna show us around? This looks like a place that's got art."

"No art," I said, not entirely sure that was true. "Do we have an art gallery?" I asked Grandma in Greek.

"We have my *kolos*," she said. Then she kindly translated into English. "My ass."

Christ on a couch. Unclothed, Grandma's rear was probably a Picasso; who knew where the hole was since gravity had got its magnetic mitts on her? And where were Xander and Aunt Rita? Grandma was three-quarters baked. How many *koulourakis* did she eat, anyway?

"Go on back," I said to the cops. "I'll be there in a minute. Don't eat the pink stuff. Everyone speaks at least a few words of English, except the old guy in the wheelchair. Don't touch his eagle—"

Lopez lifted his brows. "Eagle? Like, a real caw-caw eagle?"

"That's crows," I said. "And yes, it's real."

"What about dancing?" he said. "They gonna do that Zorba thing, maybe throw some plates?"

"Throw my plates and I will kill you where you stand," Grandma said.

They grinned uncomfortably. They had no clue that was a fact of life, not a figure of speech. Portland's not-even-close-to-finest shuffled off. They were out of their league, in over their heads, and several other similarly hopeless clichés.

A dark cloud fell over Grandma. Aunt Rita had found Xander. He was in the bottom half of a suit, tie dangling loosely around his neck.

"Mama is higher than the moon," Aunt Rita said to him. Hands on hips, he stared at Grandma in the doggy pile. "We have to get her out of here. And by *we* I mean *you*. I can't carry her in these shoes."

It was a wonder she could even carry herself around on those heels. They were thinner than knitting needles. Between the shoes and the wig she was almost as high as Grandma.

Xander crouched down beside my grandmother. He stuck out his hand, petted a brown-and-white hound on the head. The dog, recognizing a sucker when he saw one, jumped into Xander's arms. And what did Xander do? Not what Aunt Rita wanted him to do. He sat down next to Grandma to play *Who's a Good Dog then? You Are, You Are*.

"I do not believe it." My aunt pulled me aside. "What are people going to think?"

"That Baboulas likes dogs?"

"That's not her, it's the marijuana. She doesn't like dogs. I don't think she even likes people." She had a point. "What are we going to

do?"

"I don't know."

She looked down at me. Hard.

"What? Why are you looking at me like that?"

"What would you do if you were Baboulas?"

"But I'm not."

"But you will be if Mama has her way. And Mama always has her way."

"Always?"

"Almost always." She rubbed her lacquer-tipped hands together.

"So what is your plan?"

I was out of plans. Not that I'd had plans to begin with. I was taking the day as it came, at least until this party was over. Then the big plan was swing by the police building to check out mug shots. If that didn't pan out, I'd stalk Baby Dimitri's shop and maybe get a potato-quality snapshot of the third guy. Maybe then someone would be able to cough up his identity, starting with the German the police had cooped up. The voices in my head told me they were connected.

"There's only one thing to do," I told my aunt. "If you can't beat them, join them."

"In our family we do beat them."

"Beating isn't part of my plan."

I pulled my dress up a couple of inches, enough to let me flank Grandma's other side.

"You like dogs?" she asked me.

"I love dogs."

"I love dogs, too. I had one once, but your grandfather told me the Romanies took it and ate it. So I had a bunch of them killed. Turns out they did not eat my dog."

Holy cow. "What happened?"

"I burned your grandfather after he was dead, that is what happened. Now he lives in an olive can."

"Seems fair."

"Life is both long and short, Katerina. Cuddle dogs, and don't kill people unless you know for certain they are enemies. Or if you don't trust their faces. That pumpkin, I do not like him. Maybe we should have Takis take him for a walk in the woods."

"Uh, no, Grandma. I can handle the cops."

My gaze slid sideways and crashed into Xander's turned cheek. He was staring off into the distance. Was he thinking about the family who never had a chance to raise him? Grandma was responsible for the deaths of his whole family. I didn't know the finer details of the raid, only that something went wrong and Xander was the only survivor. She'd taken infant Xander in and raised him as one of her

own tribe. He knew the whole terrible story, or so Grandma told me.

“Go, go, handle them,” Grandma said. “Before the fat one eats all the food.”

The band played on. Popular Greek hits, formerly popular Greek hits, and Rembetika. I eyed the souvlaki skewers and wished I had the guts and the loose screws to jam them into my ears. There was no formal dance floor, but that didn’t stop people dancing. They formed a line and channeled their inner Zorbas all over the courtyard. Takis stood in the middle of them all, doing some kind of hip-wiggling thing. There are some things in life that can’t be unseen, like murder scenes and Takis dancing.

Lucky me, Lopez and Bishop managed to hunt me down among all these people. Lopez held up his plate like he expected a pat on the head. “I followed your advice and didn’t eat the pink stuff. What is it, anyway?”

“Fish eggs.”

“Like caviar?”

“Cod eggs, but with breadcrumbs mixed in. So it’s only about half as disgusting as caviar.”

He scratched his head. “Yeah, I never got that either. Tastes like a mouthful of rotten seawater.”

“Caviar is the bomb diggity,” Bishop said.

I rolled my eyes at him. “Nobody says ‘bomb diggity’ anymore. Not unless they want the school bully to duct tape their butt cheeks together.”

“I say it, therefore it’s cool.”

“You know you’re not cool, right?” I said. “You do know that?”

Lopez laughed into his retsina.

“Shut the fuck up,” Bishop said. He was drinking a German beer, playing it safe. Not Lopez. He’d gone semi-native with his retsina and a pile of *kokoretsi* it would take a normal person a week to plow through. No way was I going to do him a second favor—I’d already warned him about the *taramasalata*. Besides, I got a small kick out of watching him stuff his gullet with guts and icky stuff. Too bad he hadn’t been here when someone in the family accidentally added severed human penis to the organ meats.

Takis chose that moment to wander over. He had a lemonade bottle in one hand and a water gun in the other. “Bang, bang,” he said and shot me in the chest.

“Marika!” I hollered.

“Fuck the Virgin Mary,” Takis said in English, showing off for the

Americans. "What you got to do that for? We were having fun."

"You were having fun. I wanted to have fun, too, so I called your wife."

Right on cue, Marika came trotting over. She had abandoned her usual flowery dresses for a pencil skirt and a white shirt. The pencil skirt was struggling to contain her lower half. The shirt buttons were holding on for dear life. She'd scrounged up a pair of mirrored sunglasses.

"New threads?" I asked her.

"I asked Baboulas if she would pay me and she said yes," Marika told me.

Grandma must have had a change of heart ... or a belly full of pot. "When did you ask her?"

"Half an hour ago, so I went to get changed. You like?"

Takis looked her up and down. "You look like a fucking waitress."

"Bodyguard," Marika said.

"Bodyguard?" Takis scoffed. "Whose bodyguard?"

Oh boy, why me? "What was she doing when you asked her?"

Marika shrugged. "Cuddling some cats."

"And you didn't think that was strange?"

"Of course it was strange, but who questions Baboulas? Nobody, if they want to live."

"Bodyguard?" Takis was still saying. "I thought you were Katerina's sidekick."

The mirrored glasses slowly turned to face him. "And now I am her bodyguard."

"Uh, I already have a bodyguard," I said. "But I could really use a sidekick."

"Sidekick is not a paying position," she said.

"It could be," I said.

"Sidekick. Ha," Takis said, grinning. "A sidekick is just another name for a friend. You have to pay people to be friends with you, eh, Katerina?"

"At least I have friends," I said.

He covered my face with his hand. I licked it, but he didn't pull away. Eww. "You cannot be Katerina's bodyguard. People legitimately want to kill her."

"Which is why she needs another bodyguard," Marika said.

"I really don't need another one," I said, voice muffled.

Takis pulled his hand away, wiped it on my cheek.

Lopez picked that moment to jump into the conversation. "What are you saying? Is it about us?"

"Is it about me?" Takis said in a singsong mocking voice. "Me, me, me."

“Enough.” Marika slapped him on the arm. “This man is a policeman. Show respect.”

“I show him my ass,” Takis said in English. To Lopez: “You want to see my ass?”

Lopez leaned back, took a good gander at Takis’s back. “You Greeks keep offering to show me your asses. Must be true what they say about Greeks.”

Takis’ eyes narrowed. “What do they say about Greeks?”

Lopez didn’t take the bait. “It don’t look to me like you’ve got an ass. How do you sit?”

“On your mother’s head. Look! Here is my other ass. Stavros!”

Stavros came trotting over with his plate. My second cousin was the shape of a P whose loop had dropped. “Are these the American cops?” he said in English. “Is it true they make American cops fail an IQ test before they let them join?”

“Now wait a minute,” Lopez said, puffing up.

“Wait for what?” Takis folded his arms. “Can you do magic tricks? Show us. I like magic tricks.”

Lopez turned his back on Takis, waved his wine bottle at the compound’s main building. “What’s your family do, anyway?” he said to me. “They in some kind of business? Must be good at it if they can afford this place.”

“Old money, in a way,” I said.

“Old money ...” He bobbed his head, took another pull on the resinated wine. “How’d they make it, the old ones?”

“Olives.”

“What a coincidence,” he said. “I like olives on my pizza.”

“Can you believe this guy,” Takis said in Greek. “ ‘I like olives on my pizza’, like he is Greek or something.”

He and Stavros cackled together and did some kind of bottle-bumping thing I didn’t understand.

An eagle cried behind us, and Papou rocked up in his wheelchair. Yiorgos the eagle was clinging to Papou’s shoulder. The bird didn’t look happy. Basically it looked like a bird.

“Say the hello to my little friend,” Papou said to the two cops in mangled English. As far as I knew, he was stretching his English vocabulary to its short limits.

Lopez nodded to the bird. “Is that an eagle?”

Papou stared at him for a moment, then his eyes shifted to me. “What did the fat *malakas* say?”

“He wants to know if that’s an eagle.”

The old man grinned. “Tell him it’s his mother’s *mouni*.”

“I’m not telling him that!”

“Tell him. Tell him or I will tell my eagle to bite off your face.”

“Let him bite it,” I said.

He looked at the bird. “Yiorgos ... her face. Eat it.”

“Hey—you said bite, not eat,” I said. “Eating is different.”

“Wait.” Papou went digging in his pocket. He writhed and wriggled for a moment, before tugging out a gray mouse by the tail. He held it up in the air. The eagle blinked. “Fetch,” Papou said, and then he flung the very-much-alive mouse in my face.

I screamed and slapped the air and stomped around. Marika joined me. Whether it was out of solidarity or a substitute for screaming at her husband, I wasn’t sure. The mouse bolted in the direction of the arch, where all the cats were hanging out.

Yiorgos, apathetic eagle, did nothing.

“My eagle is broken,” Papou said sadly. He looked up at me. “This is your fault.”

“Me?”

“You gave me a broken eagle.”

“Oh no. He belonged to your crazy nephew. Don’t you dare pin this on me.”

The cops were laughing their stupid heads off. “Man,” Lopez said, “I’d hate to see Christmas in this joint. Your family is crazier than a bag of snakes. Wish I would understand what they’re saying.”

Papou made a face. “What’s the fatty talking about? Can you imagine the dumps this guy takes? I bet they are the size of my arm.” He held up his forearm, fist closed. He was this far away from making an obscene Italian gesture. “Takis, what is the English word for *mouni*?”

“Vagkeen,” Takis said.

“Vagkeen-a,” Stavros said, trying to help.

“Vagina!” I yelled. “The word is ‘vagina!’”

Everyone looked at me.

“Technically,” Takis said in English, “it is more like pu—”

I whirled around, shoved my finger up under his nose. “Say it and I will cut you.”

He looked around at the others. “Katerina is riding the cotton donkey.”

Marika flicked his ear. “Nobody talks to Katerina like that—not while I’m on duty.” She swiveled her head my way. “Want me to hurt him more?”

“No, but maybe you could spit in his food for me.”

“That would not be the first time,” she said.

I thought about stomping off and leaving them all to it. Standing around here making small talk with two American cops and my family wasn’t exactly finding Dad or getting to the bottom of the German situation.

“Hey, there’s that girl.” Lopez gestured in the direction of the main building with his bottle. “Didn’t know she was coming here or we’d have given her a ride.” He smirked like a ride in his piece-of-crap rental car wasn’t the ride he had in mind.

The fat cop was one of those guys who pinned the ‘girl’ label to everyone in a skirt, unless she was old enough to be his mother. Then the girls became broads. Predictably, the girl in question wasn’t a girl, she was a woman in her twenties or so. Fair hair in a sock bun. Feet in black Dr. Martens. She wore big sunglasses and a leather coat that fell mid-thigh. Looking at her made me sweaty.

“Who is she?” I asked him.

“Some girl we saw hitching at the bottom of the mountain. Would have picked her up but I couldn’t be bothered stopping.”

“No ass,” Bishop said. “No tits. No ride.”

Charming guy. Solid priorities.

“Wasn’t that.” Lopez took another slug out of the bottle, cracked a grin. “I was starving. Couldn’t stop thinking about free, home cooked food. Have to say, definitely worth not stopping.” He burped and set the bottle down so he could dump another helping of guts and goo into his maw.

No one else was looking at the new arrival, but there was something off about her. Who wears a leather coat on an August day in Greece? Someone who’s got something to hide. Process server? No. Maybe. Probably not. One of her arms was wrapped around her middle—a middle that looked thicker than it should have on a woman her size. Maybe someone in the family knocked her up and here she was, looking for restitution or a father for her unborn child.

Conspiracies and lifetime movies played in my head. I blamed it on the Greek genes.

Then my brain kicked its own butt and my memory jerked awake. The missing German woman. I recognized her from Makria, moments before she and her two buddies passed bad money off as good.

I grabbed Takis’s arm. “Get everybody out of here now. And if you can’t get everybody out, get the children out.”

Takis glanced around, confused. “What?” He had no idea what I was talking about.

“The woman.”

He turned to look at her. Took in the long, roomy coat, the hot summer day. A river was wending its way down her temples and still she clung to that coat. He was thinking what I was thinking, that she was carrying a big gun.

“Fuck the Virgin Mary and some goats,” Takis muttered.

“As long as Marika’s okay with that and you get everyone out of here, sure. Whatever floats your boat.”

But he'd already moved into henchman mode. He had his phone up to his mouth, Greek words spitting out of his mouth. He walked away from the girl, not wanting her to catch on to what was happening.

I stood there for a moment stuck on stupid, oblivious conversations going on around me. Then I snatched a couple of bottles of retsina off the nearby bed of ice and carried them to the woman, big, welcoming grin on my face. She was attractive in a bland sort of way. The kind of pretty you see on an imported candy bar wrapper, holding up a couple of milk jugs.

"Hi! Welcome to the party. You want a drink?" She looked at me blankly so I repeated myself in English.

It took her a moment but she shook her head slightly. "No. I'm not here for drinks. Is Katerina Makri here?"

I held up the bottles. "It's your lucky day. I'm Katerina. And you are ..."

"Not looking for you," she said coldly. "Where is the other one, the old lady?"

"We've got a saying back home, and it's perfect for this situation. You catch more flies with honey than vinegar—wouldn't you agree?"

"What are you talking about?"

"Oh for crying out loud." I raised one bottle and brained her with it. She stumbled backwards, hand clutching her head. Lucky for her, the bottle bounced off. Funny, in movies the bottles always smashed. Maybe Greek bottles were tougher. Her coat fell open, and I gasped. She was wired out the wahzoo, like she was about to walk into a marketplace in the West Bank.

"You fucking bitch," she said, dazed and clutching her head. "You hit me."

"Huh." I stared at the explosives strapped to her everything. "I figured you had a gun."

"Don't worry, I have a gun, too."

"I wasn't worried, but I do like to be right."

"You fucking bitch."

"You said that already."

"You stupid fucking bitch."

My heart was wiggling out. My adrenal gland was spraying adrenaline in foamy bursts like it had just flipped the cork out of a champagne bottle. Terrified? You bet. But I also wanted to smack her again with the second bottle. I was vaguely aware that she was calling me names because her plan was falling apart. The Family and its guests were melting away in the opposite direction, pouring through the back gate and to—hopefully—safety.

"Do you know any other words? 'Stupid' was a good effort, but I've

heard it before. Same with ‘bitch’. What about ‘twat’—do you know that one? Add it to your vocabulary. Thank me later when you win friends and influence people.”

Her eyes went all squinty. “What are you talking about?”

“We’ve met before, do you remember?”

She shook her head. I was slightly miffed that I was so unmemorable. Mind you, today I was all dolled up in the black dress I’d bought for funerals and other solemn Greek occasions. That day in Makria I’d been sweating like a hog in a blanket. Okay, I was sweating now, too, but I was doing it with more makeup and better hair.

“In Makria, the village up the street, you and you two buddies were looking for a meat market.”

“I remember,” she said slowly. “That was you? I remember you as fat.”

“Marika isn’t fat—she’s big and comfortable.”

“In Germany we call that fat.”

“In Germany you had Hitler.”

“Like your people never voted for the wrong person.”

I glanced behind me. The courtyard was already empty. Takis knew how to evacuate a crowd quietly and efficiently. They should hire him someplace where they needed shitweasels with ninja skills.

Okay, not completely empty. When I turned back around I glimpsed a shadow under the archway, the approximate size and shape of Xander. My heart rate slowed, but not too much. It knew when I was screwed better than I did. If the bomb went off I was going down. Well ... up first, then down. In pieces.

“Now I’ve got a fucking headache,” she said.

“You should probably have an MRI.”

“No point. It will all be over soon.”

“So what’s the plan?” I asked her. “It looks to me like it’s just the two of us.”

“I didn’t think that far ahead.”

“Do you need a minute?”

“Do you mind?”

“Be my guest. You want something to eat? A drink?”

“Too nervous. I can’t eat when I’m working.”

“I hear you. Did someone order you to do this?”

“Don’t they always? No one straps on a bomb and decides to kill some people. Okay, maybe some people do, but they are crazy. I am a good employee, that’s all.”

“Is your boss going to give you a raise? Because if that bomb goes off you won’t get to enjoy it.”

“Not me—my family. I have a little brother with a condition.”

“Really?”

“No. I’m an only child. I do my job or I am the one who dies. Either way, I die. This way I choose.”

Clearly she was pro-choice. “Who are you working for?”

“I don’t know. No name or face, only money and orders. I suppose I could kill you,” she said after a moment. “You seem annoying. I bet there are people out there who would be grateful.”

“Probably. Do you want to take a minute to update your Facebook status?”

She shook her head. “I already said *Tschüss*. If I go back now and say it again they’ll think I’m an attention whore.”

“I’m not going to update mine. Most of my Facebook friends are family, and they all ran away so they wouldn’t die.”

“You could have run, too.”

“In these heels? There’s no way.”

She looked at them. “Nice.”

“Thanks.” I slipped off my very nice shoes one at a time. “You want to try them on? We’re about the same size, I think.”

“Really? Maybe you are not so bad.”

“Actually, I’m just stalling so he can shoot you.”

She turned her head just as Xander pulled the trigger on a big gun. I bolted in the opposite direction as fast as my dress and bare feet would allow. The dress was tightish, so I couldn’t get up as much speed as I’d normally like when running away from crazy, German suicide bombers.

Then the world exploded. Or maybe it was just the German woman. A giant whoosh shoved me to the ground. Something hard and metal cracked against the middle of my back. I landed face first in one of Grandma’s small pocket gardens.

And that’s how I died.

Chapter 12

THERE WAS LIGHT. Lots of eye-searing, yellow-white light. Looked like sunshine, now that I was thinking about it.

Strong hands peeled me off the ground.

"I'm sorry for all the bad stuff I did," I babbled, "especially that one thing. And I didn't mean to swear so much. Most of the time it's just automatic, you know? I talk without thinking. Is that a sin? I know it's not one of the Ten Commandments, so do you think we could maybe negotiate on the swearing thing?"

The hands turned me around until I was facing Xander.

Hey, Xander was dead, too. And the afterlife looked just like the courtyard at the Family compound. Maybe we were in limbo ...

"Can you talk now that we're dead?" I asked him.

He raised his eyebrows.

"We're not dead are we?"

He tilted his chin up then down.

"Forget everything I just said or I'll smother you in your sleep, okay?"

Shrug. He feigned nonchalance but the depths of his eyes sparkled.

I brushed off my dress, tried to fix my hair. "What hit me in the back?"

He held up his hand. In it was the German woman's handgun.

"The woman ... is she okay?" I tried to peer past him, but he spun me around so my back was to the front of the courtyard. "Forget it," I said. "I need to see this. She's dead because ... well, not because of me, but she's dead, and a few seconds ago we were having a conversation about Facebook and shoes."

His fingers relaxed and I broke free.

And wished I hadn't.

She was dead and broken, pretty much what you'd expect under the circumstances. Nobody could survive a blast that sprayed half their insides on the ground and all over what was left of that nice leather coat. Globes of blood and tissue slid down what used to be a white stucco wall.

Poor stupid woman, it didn't have to end this way. She could have tried on my shoes, accepted a drink, ponied up more information about her employer. Instead, she pushed the button and went *BOOM*.

"Xander ... Did she actually blow herself up or was it one of those reflex things when you shot her?"

He looked at me like I was out of my tree for asking. Maybe I was, but it mattered.

"I'm going to be sick."

And I was. I doubled over and unleashed a torrent of regret, disgust, and lamb souvlaki all over Grandma's gardenias.

Back in Grandma's kitchen: "I'm sorry I puked in your gardenias."

Grandma said, "It is a lucky thing gardenias like acid soil."

"Really?"

"Really."

"Then I kind of did you a favor?"

"Too far," she said. Hey, it was worth a shot.

"She was going to kill you."

"She could have tried, and she would not have been the first. Your father saved me one time—did you know? We were coming out of *Ayia Aikaterini* in Makria."

Ayia Aikaterini, or Saint Catherine, was our namesake. Most Greeks had saints' names. Those who didn't had worthless, ungrateful parents. Names were heirlooms passed down from paternal grandparents to the firstborn children, from maternal parents to the next two. Any extra children were lucky enough to score their own names, not the hand-me-downs their older siblings were lumped with. I was an only child. Katerina it was, although I didn't know it was my grandmother's name until recently. I'd figured it was regular Greek name my parents had agreed on.

"Baby Dimitri told me."

Her eyebrow rose to a sharp, dangerous angle. "Did he? He always talks too much, that one."

"He said it was some guy called ... Kefalas, I think it was."

Grandma nodded. "George Kefalas. It was political, not personal. We Greeks are very passionate about our politics, and if the other guy does not vote the same way ... *po-po*. Big problem. People have tried before to kill me. That is the business. It happens in so-called respectable business, too, only they dress it up like a suicide or like some random person went crazy with a gun. Yes, Katerina, they have tried before. Maybe one day they will succeed, but not today, eh? Because today you were a fast, clever thinker."

"I wasn't really thinking. Mostly I was terrified."

"And yet somehow you managed, because you have my blood in you."

And the German woman's blood all over me. Basically, blood was a bit of an issue right now; I wasn't a fan.

There was a soft tap on the screen door. Xander was standing on the other side. His white shirt was flecked with red. His black pants looked damp in places. I knew it was blood, not water.

“Go with Xander,” Grandma said. “He will take care of you. And when you come back we will have coffee.”

“I could use a coffee.” My voice wobbled out.

Xander opened the door.

“Then go,” Grandma said.

I went.

Xander took me back to his man-cave for a good time. On this occasion, a good time involved a long, hot shower and big, fluffy towels. I leaned my head against the shower wall as the water worked its magic. I kept my eyes shut tight. If I opened them I’d see worms of blood wriggling toward the drain. Not mine, but knowing it was someone else’s—someone who would have killed me—didn’t cheer me up. Mostly I just felt a bone-deep sadness for the dead woman.

Partially boiled, I stepped out of the shower. On the inside of the door Xander had hung a dress—one of my sundresses. It was bright, almost offensively yellow, under the grim circumstances. I towed off, ran a comb that wasn’t mine through my hair. I snooped through the medicine cabinet and under the sink for signs of life. Apparently Xander shaved, used deodorant, and occasionally suffered from indigestion. So either he was human ... or faking humanity with these human trinkets. I put on the dress Xander had left for me. Then I looked around. Something was missing. Like, my underwear.

I gathered up my bloody clothes and stuffed them into the plastic bag Xander had also left for me. I wasn’t sure who did laundry around here, but my dirty clothes had a way of vanishing, then magically reappearing hours later in pristine condition. Maybe Grandma had some real-life equivalent of house elves. I wouldn’t put it past her, or Greece, to have mystical little creatures that did laundry and other light housework.

Xander was in the kitchen leaning against the counter, tapping periodically on his cellphone. He looked up when I walked in. His face remained expressionless.

“Thanks for the shower and the dress. There’s just one little thing missing. Two, actually.

The bastard smirked. Not a greasy, creepy smirk, but one of those sexy smirks only seriously delicious guys are capable of pulling off. The animal part of my brain was suddenly glad he’d forgotten the underwear. My animal brain could be a real idiot. Thankfully, the

woman part was still in control of this vessel.

Xander didn't exactly launch himself at me, but one second he was over there, then next second he was directly in front of me. I was getting a good whiff of the cologne I'd sniffed in his bathroom. It smelled like broken hearts and missing underwear. He inched closer until I was stuck between a wall and a hard man. His hand moved between us. He grabbed the bag of bloody clothes. His eyes went darker, as though he could read exactly what was happening in my head—lots of sweaty, naked imagery, mostly—then he backed off, taking my laundry with him. He vanished into the bathroom. I heard the hiss of the shower starting back up again.

A sigh slipped out of my lungs as the pressure eased. No robot lovin' for me today. That was good and bad, but mostly good.

Greece was making me man-crazy. And also the regular kind of crazy.

I was back in courtyard at the scene of the crime, underwear comfortably in place. The paramedics were putting a human puzzle back together. There were cops around of every stripe. Guns were one thing; bombs were another. Bombs were potential terrorism territory, and the world was twitchy. Most of the questions were aimed at me, seeing as how I'd been the only one to speak with her. I went over and over it again, until my tongue was numb and my brain was Swiss cheese. When they realized the story wasn't going to change no matter how many times I told it, they moved on to the other guests and family members—although a good number of the guests had long fled. Cops had a way of making career criminals jumpy.

Finally the bigger guns left, leaving me with Police Sergeant Pappas.

"Melas isn't going to be happy about this." He stood there wagging his head, like an oversized, mournful dog. "He really wanted to find her."

"He can still find her, only she'll be in the morgue and in pieces. Have you seen him?"

He jerked his chin up. "He'll surface when it's safe."

"He should be safe now that she's dead—right?"

His eye twitched. "You didn't hear? The third German broke out. Or someone broke him out. Either way ... gone."

Oh boy. So much for security. "When?"

"This morning. Early. We don't know what time exactly."

"You don't have security cameras? They have timestamps."

"We have cameras, but they're there for show." He looked

depressed. "It costs money to run those things. Our boss made us choose between working security cameras and toilet paper. I voted for the cameras because I have bathroom anxiety and can't go anywhere except at home."

That was way too much information.

"So now we've got two dead Germans and one on the loose?"

"He will show up," Pappas said with confidence.

That's what I was afraid of. I didn't want him to show up anywhere near me or anywhere near anyone I liked. "What happened to the guard who was supposed to be watching him?"

"He had to go to the bathroom. He was watching TV on his phone with headphones on."

Of course he was. I wanted to *thunk* my head on the nearest wall. Unfortunately the nearest wall was still covered in blood spatter and bits of leather.

Pappas stood there for a moment, arms dangling, face uncertain. He opened his mouth and closed it a time or two before committing to speaking. "Irimi, my wife, she wants you to come for drinks this evening."

Irimi. Adorable Irimi. Whose sister was Melas's former lover.

"Melas told me about her sister," I said uncomfortably.

"That is between them. I just nod my head when my wife and her sister yell at me. Life is easier that way." He wandered away, leaving me at the mercy of Takis, who was gravitating toward my side.

Takis made an unimpressed face at the wall. "I give her six out of ten. Her head was still attached."

"Ugh," I said, horrified. "What's wrong with you?"

"If you do not laugh at these things they make you crazy."

"Is that what happened to you?"

Just then, Lopez and Bishop swung back into the courtyard, flashing their badges. People actually moved aside—the idiots.

"They have no jurisdiction in this country," I yelled. "Ignore them."

The paramedics shrugged and got back to work, shutting the Oregonian cops out.

"It was worth a shot," Lopez said, all loose and easygoing for a guy built like a slab of Kobe beef.

"What are you two doing back here?" I demanded.

"We're not back. We never left. We've been taking a look around, asking questions."

Uh oh ... "Get any answers?"

"Naw. Funny how suddenly nobody speaks English after you told us they did."

"They speak English," I said. "They just don't speak nosy-cop-with-

no- jurisdiction-in-Greece. Has anyone ever told you you're annoying?"

"All the time. That's the idea. Bug someone enough and they spit up out of sheer frustration."

"Yo, it's psychology," Bishop said.

"I don't even know what goods you want!"

Lopez said, "We want to know about our buddy."

"The cop? I told you—I don't know!"

"Then we're sticking around until your father shows up. We're thinking he knows how a dead cop wound up in the captain's trunk."

Heh. About that ... I couldn't exactly say that was nothing to do with Dad and everything to do with Takis and a godfather's teenage nephew. Like it not, Takis was family. I wasn't about to dump him in the poop, even if these two clowns had no jurisdiction here.

"Wow, that's some bad luck." Hands on hips, I shook my head. "In your captain's trunk, huh? I don't suppose he did it?"

"The Captain is a good guy."

"Wouldn't hurt a fly," Bishop said.

Lopez rocked back on his heels. "Unless that fly was digging around in his pocket, acting like he was about to pull out a gun. Then he'd shoot the shit out of that fucker."

"What if it turned out to not be a gun?"

Lopez shrugged, hands in his pockets. "Nobody is right all the time."

"Well, you guys are going to be bored if you follow me around."

"I don't know, your life here looks exciting to us." Lopez pointed a finger gun at me. "Be seeing ya. You remember anything or see your old man, just look over your shoulder. We'll be there. We'll be everywhere."

I needed air and I needed it fresh, without a hint of blood, guts, or explosives. Also, I wanted it alone, but that wasn't happening. Before I reached the arch, Marika leaped out from behind the fountain, in what she considered her new bodyguard uniform.

"Where are we going?" she said, breathless with anticipation and excitement.

"First I have to look at mug shots, then I was thinking I'd do some spying."

"I like spying, especially on Takis. Are we spying on Takis?"

"Baby Dimitri's shop."

"What are we spying for? Secrets?"

I told her and she adjusted her grip on her shoulder bag. "Good

thing I brought the supplies.”

I eyed the bag. “I don’t suppose you’ve got a great camera in there?”

“No, just guns, snacks, tissues, and *servietas*, in case someone gets shot. After that Rigas shooting I want to be prepared.”

“A maxi pad wouldn’t have helped Rigas. His brother shot him in the head.”

“The *servieta* is for me. Last time I spilled my coffee.”

I looked at her, brows raised.

“What? It was good coffee. I hate to waste good coffee when someone else is making it. Nobody ever makes me coffee.”

That didn’t seem right. “What about Mother’s Day?”

“Mother’s Day. Ha! I tell you about Mother’s Day ...” She leveraged herself into the Beetle’s passenger seat, dumped her bag of goodies on the floor between her feet. “On the Mother’s Day, Takis and the boys tell me what they want for breakfast, just like every other day. No card. No present. No nothing. Not even ‘Thank you for having pity sex with our worthless father and not swallowing’, that is what.”

Yowza. Poor Marika. No wonder she’d rather tag along and hurl herself into harm’s way. “I used to make Mom pancakes.”

“No pancakes for me—only nagging. Let us go before I kill my husband for fun.”

I turned the key and the Beetle came alive. Behind us, Elias was wedging himself behind the wheel of something small, sporty, and black. Most of the Family’s cars were black. Mobsters didn’t seem like they were into colors, unless it was blood red or blood.

A face appeared in the rearview mirror. “Where are we going, bitches?”

I screamed. It had already been that kind of day, and it was barely halfway over. In the same moment, twenty guns appeared, all of them aimed at Donk, and held by various family members stationed around the property.

“What’s aaaaap?” Donk said.

“Give me a second,” Marika said, rifling through her bag. “My gun is caught on the strap.”

“It’s just Donk.” I shot daggers at him with my eyes. “Don’t waste the bullet, I want to kill him by hand.”

“You look angry,” he said. “Is it that time of the month?”

“Get out,” I said. “Now.”

He slouched back in the seat, arms behind his head. “Where are we going?”

“We aren’t going anywhere. Marika and I are going shopping.”

“Good idea. Is that supposed to be fashion? Your clothes stink—

both of you.” He tapped Marika on the shoulder. “But especially yours. I don’t think they make clothes in your size, though. Good news, there’s a camping store in Volos.”

Marika was still struggling with her gun and the handbag’s strap. She gave it a yank and it popped free, the barrel sailing past my head as I ducked. It smacked Donk directly in the forehead. He let out a small, “*Oof*,” and collapsed in the seat.

Marika got a grip on her gun. “I think I killed him, and I did not even have to shoot. That is pretty clever. I wonder if Takis can beat that?”

I was pretty sure when it came to killing, everything she could do Takis could do better. Takis was a moron but he wasn’t stupid.

“He’s not dead, but maybe we should run him by the hospital ...”

Donk groaned and sat up. “Where are we going, bitches? What’s aaaaaap?”

Marika sniffed. “Seems fine to me.”

I eased the Beetle up to the gates and waited for them to swing open. While I was waiting I delivered the bad news about our second destination.

“Okay,” Donk said. “You can let me out now.”

“Fat chance. You got in my car—you’re stuck with us now, until we say so.”

Police Sergeant Pappas had me flip through an entire nation of criminals, but none of the faces belonged to the third man from Baby Dimitri’s shop. The trip wasn’t entirely wasted: Pappas pointed out a couple of cousins I hadn’t met yet, seeing as how they were doing life.

Afterward, the three of us cruised along the waterfront. Penka’s usual stoop adjacent the beach was empty—unusual for her. She liked this spot because refreshments were close by and it attracted a classier clientele, people who could afford to pay cash for things like Adderall and whatever Ambien was called in this dry, jagged part of the world. Even drug dealers needed time off to be people, I supposed. Penka stretched her clothes to their limits, so maybe she was out shopping for something more resilient.

The Beetle didn’t blend well with traffic, so I parked it down the street and round the corner, outside a video store not too far from Baby Dimitri’s shop. A quick glance in the video store’s window said that in this part of Greece it was still 1990. VHS was not only relevant, but still king of home movies. Donk gawked as I tried to describe VCRs and the pain in the ass that was waiting for the tapes to rewind when some jackass returned it to the store without rewinding.

"How did you fit something that big in your iPhone?"

"Kid," I said. "There were no iPhones. There were no cellphones, except big clunky bricks that could snap *your* arm like a twig."

"Fack you," he said, "I lift."

"Lift what? Feathers?"

"I lift, too," Marika said. She picked him up by the waist and dumped him back in the car. "Sit. Stay. Good doggie. Maybe we will bring you a bone, eh?"

Elias had parked not far from us. He hung back as we walked, the theory being he would see danger coming if he was at a distance. The whole 'bigger picture' angle. We wandered along the beach far enough that I could see Baby Dimitri's shop but he couldn't see us unless he was paying attention. It was a risk I was willing to take. Given that my boobs were fully covered and not nearly as big as my head, I figured he wouldn't notice unremarkable me. Marika ... she was hard to miss, but she did nonchalance well. She'd hidden most of her face behind big glasses, the rest of it concealed by a sun-blotting ice cream cone.

"I never get to eat all my ice cream," she said between licks. She was making up for lost dessert.

We parked ourselves on a vacant bench, swooping in as a family of red-skinned tourists ambled away, dazed by the sun and heat. I'd brought a book so I had something to peek over.

"Say something funny," Marika said.

"Like what?"

"It won't be funny if I tell you what to say. I want to be surprised."

"I don't know any Greek jokes."

"Tell me an American one."

Oh boy. This was going to go well, I could tell. My joke delivery sucked at the best of times. I was renowned for stumbling through to the end, then blowing my own punch line by prematurely laughing. Most of the time no one heard the punch line because it was filtered through my hooting.

I told her the one about the Greek and Italian who were discussing sex. The Greek said his people invented sex. The Italian said, Yes, but we invented it with women.

Marika didn't laugh. Marika nodded solemnly and said, "I say this with love, but has anyone ever mentioned you stink at telling jokes? We invented sex with women. Italians invented bestiality. Ask Caligula."

"I can't exactly ask him, on account of how he's dead and has been for a long time."

"Very convenient, no? That's how the Italians are, always dodging the difficult questions."

I thought that was a whole lot like the Greeks. "Probably if

Caligula had a choice he'd still be alive."

Marika threw back her head and faked laughed, then she took another long slurp of her ice cream.

I looked at her. "What was that?"

"I wanted to look like I was having a good time. It is called acting. A good bodyguard and spy should be able to act naturally. On a scale of one to ten, how good was I?"

"They don't have a number for that."

"*Hmph!* What do you know about acting?"

"Nothing," I admitted. "I just watch movies and TV, that's all."

There was movement across the street. Okay, that wasn't exactly a surprise. We were on a busy beach on a hot afternoon, when most Greeks were about to take to their beds until the sun began to nosedive; movement, and lots of it, was part of the fabric of the place. This movement was Laki. He got up from his chair and began a plodding walk along the pavement, hands in his pockets, grin slapped on his face.

Where was he going?

I followed him with my eyes as he slouched past Lopez and Bishop, snugged up to the curb in their semi-mobile garbage can. I hadn't realized they'd tailed me. Probably Elias knew though.

"Uh oh," I said.

Laki didn't stop until he was maybe twelve feet past the Renault. Then he scratched his head and turned around, as though he'd dropped a few of his marbles. I hadn't yet been able to figure out where Baby Dimitri's pal stashed his bottle supply, but sure enough he was gripping one in his hand, Zippo lighter at the ready. He touched it to the rag and tossed it in through the Renault's open window.

"What?" Marika followed my line of sight. "*Ay-yi-yi.*"

Lopez and Bishop screamed. They flung open the car doors and hurled themselves out into the street. Lopez leopard crawled across the road, dodging the traffic that had slowed to watch the pretty fire. Bishop made it to his feet before the car blew and the blast flattened him.

Over at the shoe and souvenir shop, Baby Dimitri wasn't paying attention to anything except his phone. He was in the throes of a heated conversation. Lots of hand waving and loud voices. I couldn't hear him from here, but anger was rolling off him in waves. He was more turbulent than the sea at my back. Which wasn't exactly saying much. The only time the Pagasetic Gulf made waves was when the wind and moon shoved it around.

"We should go help them," I said, thrusting my book into my bag.

Marika faked another hair-tossing laugh. "If we do we will break cover."

I glanced over at Elias, who was slouched against a streetlight, pretending to read a map. He didn't seem worried about the burning car or Lopez, who had pulled himself to his feet and was now stabbing the air with his finger.

"You crazy motherfucker!" Lopez yelled at Laki. "The fuck is wrong with you? That's my car, you fucking fuck!"

Laki beamed. Hands in his pockets, his work done, he took his sweet time strolling back to Baby Dimitri's shop. He plopped down in his usual seat, grinning the grin of the truly loony. Baby Dimitri ended the call and plunked himself down in his chair beside the door. There was nobody in the middle chair today. He said something monosyllabic to Laki, who lobbed back something of equal size.

We watched as the fat cop peeled his skinny partner off the sidewalk. They stood there swapping a lot of low words, while black, chewy smoke spiraled in every direction. Then, decision made, Lopez went striding off in the direction of Baby Dimitri's shop, face like a fast-moving hurricane. The big cop was a dead man walking. Even the incoming fire truck wouldn't be able to save him now.

He planted himself in front of the two mobsters, hands on hips, mouth moving a mile a minute in a language they barely understood. Laki, I thought, probably didn't know any English beyond the basics: arson; fire; burn, baby, burn.

The Godfather of Knickknacks and Footwear didn't break eye contact with the beach. His arms were folded. His legs were crossed. He broke the pose for a moment to pick at his teeth with his pinkie nail, then he resumed the arm folding. If Lopez was alive and standing in front of him, ranting and raving, Baby Dimitri didn't show it. To him the cop was nothing more than sun-hardened gum on the sidewalk. Baby Dimitri shoved the phone against his ear again. He talked for a moment then hung up and went back to his original don't-care position.

It was about thirty seconds later that a couple of strapping young men hauled ass across the street. They were in flip-flops and swim shorts and black sunglasses. Somewhere in time, Annette Funicello and Sandra Dee were flicking their hair, plotting to invite them to a bonfire. The hired hands closed in on the two Portland cops, then they each grabbed one and steered them into the shop.

They didn't come back out. Any of them.

Baby Dimitri leaned back in his chair, hands behind his head. He was a magician, the king of this strip, and he had just made two problems disappear.

"We should go," I squeaked.

"That's what I was thinking," Marika said. "I could use a coffee after all this spying. Did we get anything?"

“No.”

“That is too bad. I thought for sure all this hard work would pay off.”

We trotted back to the convertible, with Elias following a few dozen feet back. The car was empty, no sign of Donk.

I looked up the street, down the street. Nothing. “Where did he go?”

Marika glanced around. “Who?”

“Donk. We left him here, right?”

“I remember now. Probably he went to scope out breasts at the beach.”

That sounded like Donk. Actually, that sounded like most teenage boys.

I reached for the car door.

Elias grabbed my arm. “Don’t. I think there’s a bomb.”

Yikes! “A ... a bomb? On my car?”

He crouched down beside the Beetle, indicated for me to do the same. Then he pointed out a flashing red light, stuck to the undercarriage.

“Either it’s a bomb or a transmitter of some kind,” he said.

“So ... what do we do?” Because I had no idea what to do about red flashing things under my car. But fortunately Elias did. He made a phone call, then he told me someone from the Family was on their way. It was kind of nice having a bodyguard. A bit like having a baby sitter who does what you tell them to do. You want ice cream? No problem? Need a bomb removed? Cool.

I tried to ignore the bits of me that were quietly freaking out. Someone had already tried to blow me up today, and now someone else wanted in on the explosive action. If it was a bomb. Maybe it was a harmless transmitter, put there by someone who just wanted to follow me around. Because that wasn’t creepy and stalkerish at all.

Chapter 13

MARIKA and I sat on the curb, under the shade of a beech. Heat wafted up off the road in damp woolen sheets.

“Virgin Mary,” Marika said, fanning her face with her hand. “This summer is a hot one.”

I knew zip about Greek summers, except that they were hot. “Worse than normal?”

“The same.”

A couple of old biddies stopped to gape at us. Well, me—they were gawking at me.

One of them summoned up some courage. “Aren’t you ...?”

“No,” Marika said. “Move along before I shoot you both for fun.”

They hurried away, exchanging whispers and probably vicious gossip.

“Good thing you have me to guard you,” Marika said. “You are like a rock star.”

More like there had been a puff piece about me in the newspaper, accompanied by a ton of speculation about what I was doing in Greece and what my future would hold. And, okay, maybe a picture or two: me dining with Detective Melas, and a charming portrait of me being hauled out of an alley upside down, minutes after a serial killer added me to his must-kill list.

Rock star sounded like a better deal. I wanted to be one of those.

“I wouldn’t mind being a rock star,” I said. “Too bad I have no musical talent.”

“Nobody cares if you have no talent. Image is everything,” said the woman dressed like a waitress. “That’s why I have these mirrored glasses. Without them I could be anyone. These glasses say danger cannot touch you. I see everything.”

“Elias saw the red light first.”

“Yes, but only because he saw it first. I would have seen it first if he hadn’t.”

Somewhere, Socrates was face-palming.

About three years of endless summers later, a black van pulled up alongside the Beetle. The windows were tinted. The rims were dull black. It looked like a kidnapping waiting to happen. Or an arrest. The side panel slid open and two of the cousins jumped out. They unloaded a couple of big metal cases, carried them over to the Beetle. The van’s front window rolled down. Stavros was driving. He waved

us over.

“Get in,” he said.

We climbed in. If the Family bomb disposal team screwed up there was a chance they wouldn’t live to do the *sirtaki* another day.

I leaned over the front seats. “Are they going to be okay?”

“Probably,” Stavros said. “They are the best. Okay, maybe not the best, but two of the top ten.”

“In the world?”

“No ...”

“In Greece?”

He made a face, wiggled his hand in a so-so move. “In this part of the country.”

“I really liked that car,” I said wistfully. “Probably I would have liked my cousins, too, if I’d gotten to know them better.”

Stavros eased the van down the block, until he decided we were a safe distance away. He parked, and then put on a headset so he could communicate with the technicians.

“That’s what me and this one need,” Marika said, nodding to Elias. “Everyone would know we were professionals with those little headsets.”

Elias had been watching out the van’s back window this whole time. Now I saw him flinch.

“You don’t need headsets,” I told her. “You’re better off blending in.”

“Then how will everybody know I am a bodyguard?”

Elias flinched again. I wanted to pat him on the shoulder and assure him that eventually Marika’s bodyguard fad would pass—probably around the time bullets flew, if it came to that.

Stavros laughed in the front seat.

Marika’s eyes narrowed to dangerous slits. “What is so funny?”

His laugh died a quick, bloodless death. “Nothing. I am listening to those two *malakes* back there.”

She settled back down in her seat, huffing. It was obvious she didn’t believe him. She was oversensitive about the situation, thanks to her husband’s mockery.

“I still think we should have those little headsets. I will have to do my hair a new way though so it does not get all messed up. Maybe we could get those earpieces instead, like the Secret Service.”

“You’re not the Secret Service,” I said.

“I could be. I have ambition, goals. Takis does not believe me but I am more than a housewife.”

Stavros glanced back. “What is wrong with being a housewife? I would love to be a housewife. Uh, househusband.”

Marika snorted. “In this family? Good luck.”

His face fell. "It could happen."

Family values were complicated in the Makris family ... and in Greece. The women were women and the men were worried about where that was going.

"What do you think, Katerina?" Elias said.

"About ...?"

"Househusbands."

"People should do what makes them happy."

"Baboulas won't live forever," Elias said. "When she dies and you take over, maybe you see that Stavros gets the life he wants."

We all looked at him. Stavros and Marika gasped. Marika crossed herself frantically.

"What?" He shrugged. "It's what everyone is saying. The old woman can't live forever."

"She will try," Stavros said in a reverent tone.

Someone knocked on the side of the van. Marika whipped out one of her smaller guns and—*PEW*—shot a hole clean through the sliding door. Elias leaped over the seat and tackled her.

"Fuck the Virgin Mary!" Stavros yelled. "What are you doing?"

"Someone has to protect Katerina," Marika said, her face squished into the upholstery. "Katerina, are you okay?"

The hole was the size of a dime. I peered through it. If there was a body on the ground I couldn't see it.

"Why aren't we deaf right now?" I asked.

"Silencer," Marika said. "A good bodyguard can kill someone quietly."

"I think you're getting bodyguards and assassins mixed up," I told her.

There was another knock on the side of the van. A voice said, "Don't shoot." Then the door slid open and Detective Melas peered in. His face was all frowny; not surprising since Marika had just tried to blow a hole in him. After his German encounter he had to be getting twitchy around guns.

"Aren't you supposed to be hiding?" I asked him.

"I still am. Mostly." He climbed inside, scooted me over so he could sit beside me. His arm went over the back of the seat, this close to being a teenage pre-grope. The wig was still on his head. When he saw me glance at the pretend hair he pulled it off, dumped it in his lap. "What's going on? Why is Marika shooting at people?"

"She's my new bodyguard."

Melas's eyebrows rose. "I thought Elias was your bodyguard."

"Where was Elias when you tried to break into the van just now, eh? Sitting here on his *kolos*," Marika said, voice distorted by the squashing.

“Let her up,” I told Elias. I reached over to help her back into the upright position. She shot Elias in the face with her eye lasers—and hers were wicked. The woman had sons and Takis. She’d had practice.

Melas looked confused. “I thought she was your sidekick,” he said to me.

“I was,” Marika said. “But bodyguard is a paying position.”

Melas grinned. “She’s getting paid to be your friend, honey.”

I pulled back so I could get a good glare in. “What are you doing here?”

“I was driving past and saw a couple of guys working on your car. Then I saw the van parked further up. Figured I’d come see what was up.”

“Bomb under my car,” I said. “Maybe.”

Stavros bobbed his head up front. “Bomb,” he agreed.

Hearing confirmation sucked all the sass out of me. Someone had gone to the trouble of strapping a bomb to my car to kill me.

I flopped back in the seat, covered my face with my hands. As hiding places went, it sucked. “I want to go home.”

“There was a dead policeman in your home,” Marika reminded me. “At least here you have got bodyguards.”

“And people trying to blow me up. Did you hear about the suicide bomber at Grandma’s party?”

Melas looked shocked. “What?”

I told him all about it.

Face grim, he leaned back in his seat, closed his eyes for a moment. “I don’t have my phone,” he said. “I really need it. I suppose I can go get it now that all the Germans are accounted for.”

“Uh ...”

“What?”

I passed on what Pappas had told me, and his face morphed from grim to apoplectic. “He escaped? What was everyone doing? Sleeping?”

“The guard was using the facilities with the headphones on.”

“I hate it when Takis does that,” Marika said behind me. “He sings. And if he is watching a movie he yells when there are guns and shooting.”

“I do that,” Melas said.

“Me too,” Stavros said.

Elias waved his hand.

“I think that’s just a man thing,” I said. Dad used to flip out watching mob movies. Now I understood why.

“Time to go,” Melas said. He wrapped his arm around my shoulder and kissed my hair. “Don’t get blown up.”

“Where are you going?”

"I need to get my phone back somehow. Maybe Pappas can get it."

"I'll go," I said. "We've been in the paper together. No one will think it's weird if I'm visiting you in the hospital."

"I won't mind if you look sad and cry a bit while you're there."

"Don't push your luck, or I'll pull the plug."

He dumped the wig back on his head, kissed my hair again, and grinned.

"You wouldn't pull the plug."

"I'd think about it."

He winked and he was gone.

"Virgin Mary." Marika crossed herself. "He wants you."

"He's just being friendly." Yeah right. Even I didn't believe that.

"Takis used to be that friendly when he wanted to—"

"Stop," I said. "I don't want to know."

In the front seat, Stavros pulled off his headset. "You can relax now. It looked like a bomb but it was not a bomb."

"What looks like a bomb but isn't a bomb?"

He shrugged. "A fake bomb?"

"Is that a real thing that exists? What do you do with a fake bomb?"

"Put it under people's cars and make them think it is a real bomb?" Stavros guessed.

"I bet they make them in China," Marika said.

Probably she was right, but I was worried about the kind of person who would stick a fake bomb under my car. What was the point—to scare me? When the question made it out of my mouth, Marika said, "It was probably that little bastard, Donk. He planted the fake bomb and left."

"Why?" That didn't sound like Donk. Although I hadn't expected him to take a summer job as a wannabe assassin, either. For all I knew someone slipped him a few bucks to slap the contraption in place. Donk was a kid. A few bucks would be a small fortune. He was probably at a strip club right now, wedging single euro bills in a stripper's crack.

Everyone looked at me, horrified.

"Heh," I said. "I thought I was just thinking that."

"You must think loud because we all heard you," Stavros said. He started up the van, checked the mirror and did a quick U-turn. He blasted his horn at a donkey and its owner, walking the wrong way on the road. "You want to take your car?"

I eyed the Beetle. "Is it safe?"

"The guys checked the whole vehicle. No problems."

"Then I'll take the car. Marika, Elias, you guys coming to the hospital?"

“If he is going, I am going,” Marika said. “My reflexes are dynamite. *Pew, pew.*”

I leaned forward to talk to Stavros. “Sorry about the van. If Baboulas asks, blame it on me. She’s less likely to cut off my head and roll the leftovers into a ditch.”

“I hope you are right,” he said.

Middle of the afternoon meant easy pickings in the hospital parking lot. We were parked and basking in the air conditioning two minutes after I swung into the hospital’s driveway.

“I will wait for you here,” Marika said, parking herself in one of the plastic lobby chairs. “This way if anyone suspicious walks in I can shoot them.”

“No—no shooting!”

The woman at the reception desk eyed us.

“What is she looking at?” Marika said.

“You.”

Marika waved. “It is okay, I am a professional bodyguard,” she called out. “I get a paycheck and benefits.”

I raised an eyebrow. “Benefits?”

“Baboulas said I could have whatever I wanted.”

“Baboulas wasn’t herself when she said that.”

“What do you mean?”

I shook my head. “Nothing. We’re going upstairs. I’ll call if there’s any trouble.”

“If you hear shooting, that is just me taking out the bad guys.” She scowled at Reception Lady, whose hand was inching toward the phone. The woman was this close to calling for reinforcements. “I need a badge, something that tells people I have a right to shoot things.”

“My Virgin Mary,” Elias muttered.

“That’s called a police badge,” I told Marika.

“Hmm,” she said. “Baboulas would not like it if I joined the police.”

That was an understatement.

We left Marika in the lobby exchanging dirty looks with the receptionist and rode the elevator up to the ICU. The Family was still on duty, parked outside the ward and fake-Melas’s room. His mother was inside, talking with a tall blonde in skinny jeans. She was built like a beautiful broom: lots of hair; slim from the neck down. When she turned around my eyes hooked on the small fortune of stones dangling between a pair of high, round boobs. If there was a God

those were fake—the cleavage and the jewels.

“Fake,” Elias said.

“Did I think out loud again?”

“No. But I know fake breasts when I see them.” He went into long, laborious, uncomfortable details about the difference. Finally, the blonde came swishing out the door and he shut up. She glanced at me briefly, then took off on those stupid long legs of hers, bound for wherever perfect people go when they’re not hanging out with the rest of us slobs. Probably one of those swanky places from *American Psycho*.

Inside the room, Kyria Mela wagged her finger for us to come in.

“How is he?” I said, eyeing the bandage-wrapped figure on the bed. He was Melas’s approximate size and shape, but it wouldn’t fool anyone who knew him well ... or who had fantasized about seeing him naked.

“Eh, as well as can be expected after being shot full of holes,” she said darkly. Her voice dropped. “You know, of course.”

“I know. Can I ...?” I indicated the chair at his side. The dragon stepped back and allowed me to enter the sanctum. A dragon doesn’t mind you checking out its fake gold. I plopped down in the roomy faux leather seat. It farted. Nobody looked at me. They must have been used to the chairs around here. “Hey,” I said to the guy in bandages. “It’s me, Katerina. You asked me to get your phone, so here I am getting your phone. I’m going to slide my hand into the drawer nice and easy and—”

Kyria Mela dropped a cellphone into my lap.

I picked it up. “Is this ...?”

“My son’s phone. I did not want to risk anyone taking it, so I have been keeping it on me, at all times.”

“He needs it. He asked me to get it for him.”

“Of course he did. You would not dare come here and take it if he did not ask it of you.” Her dark eyes searched my face for signs of lies and weakness. Fortunately, Melas really had asked me to get his phone, so the truth was on my side—this time. “Do not bother snooping. He has a password.” She flashed me a guilty look. I stifled my laugh, but she caught me. “It is not what you think. I was looking out for his best interests.”

Using the age-old art of snooping, of course.

“How many passwords did you try?”

“Eh, a few,” she said, easing her hip onto the bed. “Now let me ask you: How is he?”

“Tough. Two of the Germans are dead now, and the other one broke out of jail.”

“*Po-po*,” she said. “Those idiots. They chose toilet paper over

security. Who does that?"

I didn't tell her I probably would. Once you've wiped with newspaper or single ply, you'll give up just about anything for soft and quilted.

Elias was by the window. "Look," he said, nodding.

On the sidewalk below, Lopez and Bishop were climbing out of a cab. The two cops were relentless.

Kyria Mela joined us at the window. Her nose wrinkled up.

"What is this? Who is this fat man? Look how fat he is. Is that real or is he wearing one of those fat suits?"

"I think that's his real fat," I told Kyria Mela.

"*Po-po* ... Can you imagine how much he eats?" She made a face. "I hope he does not use a Greek toilet while he is here—he will block the whole system. And this one." She was talking about Bishop. "Why is he dressed like a unfashionable teenager? Does he think it makes him look younger? It only makes him look like one of those sad, pathetic men who reaches fifty and buys a sports car so women will not notice he has no hair and a pocket of blue pills. What are these two doing? How do you know them?" Her eyes narrowed to suspicious slits. I hadn't done anything wrong, but try telling my sudden attack of guilt that. "Are they your ... *friends*?"

"Not friends. They're American cops. They followed me here."

"Why?"

"It's possible they think I had something to do with their dead colleague."

"Did you?"

"No! I was wrestling a killer in a basement here in Greece when it happened."

A moment passed while she did something thinking. "Maybe you would make a good wife for my Nikos. You can handle murderers well. But you also attract crazy people and problems, so you cannot marry him."

"I don't want to marry him."

"You will. All the women want to marry him. He has a good job and he is a good-looking boy. And he is built like his father, if you know what I mean." Then she winked. Or she had something in her eye. I desperately wanted it to be the second one.

"Uh, okay ..."

"Not okay." She shook her finger at me. "No Nikos for you. I wish I did not like you, but I like you. Life is full of complications, remember that."

As if I could forget. I was tripping over complications all over the place. I couldn't walk from my bedroom to Grandma's kitchen without complications, especially if my feet were bare.

“Come sit with me if you like,” she said, settling into one of the chairs at fake-Melas’s bedside. Her words said I had a choice. Her tone said no—no choice. I could sit or she could sit me. It must have been fun growing up in the Melas household, although Melas probably had an easier time of it than his siblings. He was the dark-haired golden boy of the family.

“Uh, thank you,” I said and followed her finger to one of the vacant farting chairs.

“Not your friends, though, if they make it up this far. No Greek hospitality for stalkers. Instead, I will show them Turkish hospitality.”

I wasn’t sure the Turks were that cold or frightening, although there was a high probability that they had their own Kyria Mela types. Every culture had them.

“They’re not my friends, I swear.”

Her head turned slowly. I suspected she was about to shoot lasers at me with her eyes. “So you say.”

I mumbled my goodbyes and bolted into the hallway, where I could breathe again.

“She scares me,” Elias said. “Did you see her eyes? I bet she sacrificed something to the gods.”

“She freaks me out, too.”

He pushed the elevator button to go down. “She looks at you like she wants to toss you into an active volcano.”

“Do we have any of those around here?”

“Santorini.”

“Could she throw me that far, do you think?”

“If she asks you to get on a boat with her, say no.”

Good advice—advice I planned to take. Kyria Mela liked me but she didn’t approve of me, which was the same thing but not quite.

The elevator pinged. The doors opened and we got in. This time I pushed the button.

Elias took a deep breath. “About Marika ...”

“It’s a phase,” I said. “Takis has kept her cooped up for years with their kids, and now she’s getting a taste of freedom. She’ll move onto something else soon.”

The elevator pinged again and the doors opened. We stepped into the lobby and I began to scan for Marika, who was conspicuously absent.

“Christ on a cat,” I muttered. I trotted over to reception, where the same rock-faced woman sat hunched over her keyboard. She looked up. Recognition flickered in her eyes.

“Oh. It’s you.”

“Have you seen my friend?”

“She said she was a bodyguard.”

"It's complicated," I said. "Where is she?"

The woman pointed.

My eyes followed her finger, through the lobby, out the door. Marika was outside, cuffed to the wheelchair ramp's railing. She was in the starfish position, trying to hook her shoulder bag's strap with her foot. Someone had dumped it in the garden, just out of her reach.

"What happened?" I asked the receptionist.

"She did."

The receptionist's attention slid back to her keyboard and screen. I was dismissed. Feeling like a naughty schoolchild, I hunched my shoulders and crept outside. At least Elias seemed mostly normal. He hadn't fired any guns near my head or gotten himself bounced from a hospital. So what if he'd started his career trying to kill me.

"Oh boy," I said, surveying the damage that was my cousin's, cousin's, cousin's wife.

"Don't just stand there," Marika said. "Get my bag."

I bobbed down and shimmied between the rails, stretching until I managed to snag the strap and pull. It landed at her feet with a plop and an ominous dull clank.

"Guns," she said matter-of-factly.

"How many do you need?"

"Different guns for different situations. The submachine gun for when I have to shoot a lot of people fast, like an army. A middle size gun for shooting at people one at a time. The smaller gun with a silencer, for when I need to be stealthy. And a tiny gun to strap to the inside of my thigh when we go to fancy places."

I looked at her skirt. "Why is that one in the bag?"

"Have you ever strapped a gun to your leg? Very uncomfortable. I don't know how those women on TV do it."

"Actresses get paid a lot of money."

"I probably would not mind so much either if Baboulas paid me more."

My gaze cut to Elias, who was staring into the distance, looking like he was praying silently for a swift death. For his sake and mine, I hoped Marika's bodyguard phase would pass—and soon.

I assessed the cuffs while Marika poked around inside her bag, one-handed. "I don't suppose Security left the keys?" I said.

"I will ask." Elias looked like he'd take any excuse to get away from Marika.

I could get these open easy enough with a piece of wire. Popping handcuffs was something I'd practiced alone Grandma's guest room with Melas's cuffs and the help of a YouTube video. The more I thought about it the sadder that sounded.

"I can—" I started.

BANG!

Elias threw himself at me, knocking me to the ground. I shoved him off me and brushed myself off. Marika was frowning into the gun barrel.

“Huh,” Marika mouthed. “That always works on TV.” She aimed at the handcuffs’ short chain and fired again. And a third time. My eardrums packed their bags and bailed, stuffing my ears with tiny bells before they exited. My thoughts were accompanied by a small ding-a-ling.

The hospital’s doors burst open, silently. A big, burly Security guard with a gun strapped to his hip and a dead ferret taped under his nose glared out at us.

The dead ferret twitched and jerked.

I held out my hand. “Keys,” I whispered.

Security Guy rolled his eyes and unhooked a key ring. He jammed a tiny key into the cuffs, popping them open. The ferret jiggled around again. I couldn’t hear a word the man was saying, but from his expression I guessed it was rude, threatening, and obscenity-laden. Marika mouthed something about his mother, and he grabbed her by the elbow and marched her to the bottom of the ramp. She clubbed his ear with her tiny gun. He stomped on her foot and made a hasty retreat while she was hopping around, gripping her shoe.

It was official: we were the Stooges.

Elias and I each grabbed one of Marika’s elbows. We steered her along the sidewalk, headed toward the car.

Something grabbed my arm.

“Argh!” My ears were still closed for business, but the sudden rawness in my throat said I’d screamed. I whipped around. Lopez was there, palms up, mouth moving. “Tell someone who can hear you,” I might have said.

My hearing returned just in time for the yelling: Takis vs. Marika. I ducked my head and bolted, stopping to pet my goat when he jumped out in front of me. After a quick head-butt and some scratching, he trotted back to his peeps—the compound’s canine collection. I was pretty sure he thought he was one of them, although he probably wondered why he couldn’t lick his own butt.

Grandma was taking a nap, but she called out to me as I snuck past.

“What is that noise?”

“Marika and Takis.”

“What are they fighting about?”

“About that ... Did you give Marika a job as my bodyguard?”

She looked at me, bleary-eyed. She had the face of a basset hound and the body of an orangutan. I wished I'd known her before time hammered her like a set of bongos.

“I thought I dreamed that.”

“No,” I said. “Not a dream.”

She said a word I didn't know she knew. Mind you, she was possibly around at its inception. Someone saw a young Grandma marching towards them with a gun and spat the word out.

“I don't think Marika and Takis are going to be doing that for a while,” I said.

“No, but you should before you get too much older. I would like to know my great-grandchildren before I die, even though immortality is my plan ...”

Not that she was pressuring me or anything.

“... In fact, a man is coming here tonight I want you to meet.”

“Grandma ...”

“Just meet him. You might like him. And if you do not ... marry him and maybe get to like him, eh?”

Joke was on her—I wouldn't be here tonight. I'd already promised Pappas I'd show up at his place for drinks. So I said, “Okay, Grandma.”

Elias and I parked at the bottom of the street and panted under a dimming sun that wanted to take one last punch. Why couldn't it just go away? My lungs were tired of huffing furnace-heated air. The hill rose up ahead of us. From here it looked like a giant finger, flipping the bird. Probably it was my mindset, which was skewed at best. Someone had stuck a fake bomb to my car; that really twists a woman.

Marika had wanted to come, but while we were at the hospital, her boys had spent the afternoon conducting medical experiments on each other, using her kitchen appliances. Now she had to mop up bodily fluids and rush to church to light candles so that her sons wouldn't become serial killers. I didn't mention that serial killing was an asset in the Makris family. So now I was climbing a merciless hill with Elias for company. He was dressed for the job in black cargo pants, boots, and a black T-shirt. He wore a gun on his hip and black glasses covering his eyes.

“Have you been taking fashion tips from Xander?”

“No. Why?”

I shook my head. “No reason.”

“Do I look okay?”

"Totally fine."

"Are you sure? Because Stavros said it suited me, but I don't know ..."

"If there's one thing Stavros knows it's cooking," I said. Not fashion. Definitely not fashion.

He looked at me, face uncertain. "Okay ..."

Why did everyone have to live on a hill? Probably because Greece was made of shifting land, and shifting land had nowhere to go but up.

We were halfway up to the Pappas house when I noticed a moped following us. It was trying to climb the incline but the motor was having existential issues; if it quit ticking would it remain a moped or would it become a bicycle? Perched on its back were Lopez and Bishop. Bishop was at the rear, holding on like he wasn't gay—nope, not him. I desperately wanted Lopez to be wearing one of those shirts that read, *If you can read this, the bitch fell off*. But alas, he was in the same Hawaiian shirt he'd been in earlier. Some things changed, but his wardrobe wasn't one of them.

I eyed the big cop as he took mercy on the moped and let it pass out alongside us.

"What's with the moped?" I asked him.

"Well, thanks to your pal Laki, we can't even rent a piece of shit. That Dimitri guy offered us fifty euros or certain death, so we took the money. Then we bought this from some old guy who really wanted to get rid of it."

I could see why. "Where are you guys staying?" It had to be close by; wherever I was, there they were. Sometimes, like outside Baby Dimitri's, they even managed to be there before me.

Lopez's eyes went shifty. "Why? What's it to you?"

"Just making conversation."

"You want to make some conversation, yo, how about you tell us where your dad is hiding out.," Bishop said.

As if I would, even if I could. "You guys do know he's an adult, and adults can go do adult stuff without telling their kids, right?"

Lopez's grin oozed across his face. "Sounds to me like he's shackled up somewhere with a lady friend. He got one of those?"

Elias moved closer. "Just say the word, I could pull a Marika."

My lips twitched. "I'm late, I'm late, for a very important date." On that note, I turned back around and marched up to the Pappas house like I'd caught my second wind. In reality, I was faking it and dying inside. My lungs weren't made for hauling ass up Greece's peaks.

I glanced back. The cops were still there. They seemed to be arguing, probably about how Bishop was going to stay on without touching some part of Lopez. It wouldn't be easy. Lopez had the kind

of body that required a lot of seat.

When we reached the yard, Police Sergeant Pappas was performing the ritual of watering the yard. He had a hose in one hand and a stain on his T-shirt that made it look like he'd had chest-on collision with a bag of Cheetos.

"Desp—" he started, then shook his head. "Katerina, and ...?"

I introduced Elias as my bodyguard and they shook hands.

"I don't envy you, friend," Pappas said to him. "Trouble always finds this one."

"Hey, I'm standing right here," I said.

"Yes, she is," came a high-pitched voice. Irini came rushing out of the house; I was starting to think she had one speed: full-on. "My love, what is wrong with you that you leave guests standing here with nothing to eat or drink?"

"They just got here," Pappas mumbled.

"That is no excuse, my little snail." She reached up, pecked him on the cheek. Pappas glowed—and not entirely from embarrassment. It was obvious he adored his wife.

Irini turned her kewpie eyes on me. "My Virgin Mary, what are you doing?"

Good ol' Greeks, always more worried about what you're doing than how you are. One of those things is gossip worthy, and it's not how you feel about stuff. There was nothing juicy about, *I saw so-and-so this morning and she was sad*.

"Nothing much," I said, trying to breathe. Irini had flung her arms around my middle. The woman didn't know her own strength, and I didn't know how such a tiny thing had so much muscle power. Eggs and bench-pressing her husband?

"I heard about the suicide bomber." She pulled back, holding my hands in hers. "What was she wearing?"

Say what? "A leather coat and Dr. Martens."

Her nose wrinkled up. "In summer?"

"It makes sense if you're trying to hide a bomb."

"I'm so glad she didn't blow you up. I would have hurled myself on your coffin and wept louder than anyone else, I swear."

Irini seemed like she formed attachments quickly. There had to be a fancy disorder name for that.

"Don't worry, I'm immortal."

Wide-eyed: "Really?"

"Uh, no. I'm joking."

She looked past me at Elias. "Katerina brought a friend!" She did a little clap. "I brought a friend, too. Well, my sister. Which makes her my mortal enemy half the time." She leaned close, whispered, "Sometimes I want to cut her and set fire to her face."

Yikes! Made me glad, for once, that I was an only child. I'd wanted siblings on and off during childhood, but my parents had been uncooperative.

Then it hit me: her sister was Melas's ex. The same Melas who dropped kisses in my hair and hinted constantly that an expedition to my southern hemisphere was on his bucket list. This was going to be interesting—and by interesting I meant I wanted to curl up in a ball and roll back down the hill. It wasn't that I was jealous; it was more like regular, old school envy. Irini's sister was someone normal. She wasn't a mobster's granddaughter and her father wasn't currently missing. Probably she didn't even have an ex who'd turned last-minute gay before the wedding and fallen throat-first on a human sausage. That was the kind of woman Melas could date. No baggage, no connections of the illegal kind.

Irini grabbed my hand, dragged me over to the table, sat me down on one of the same chairs that every Greek home seemed to have. Simple wood chairs with a lacquered straw seat. These were painted the blue of Greece's flag.

The air parted behind us. We both turned around.

Irini rolled her eyes. "This is my sister, Hera."

Gulp. Smooth, shiny blond hair. Perfect skin. I recognized her as the blonde from Melas's room.

My inner envious bitch said shark; the rest of me sighed and admitted some women were airbrushed from birth. I wasn't one of them. Already there were signs of impending decrepitude in my mirror.

The goddess said. "I saw you today at the hospital outside Nikos's room. I would have introduced myself then but I was in a hurry."

Yeah, for her Models Anonymous meeting.

"I think I saw you, too." And those boobs. Which from this angle looked potentially, horrifically, real. I hunched my shoulders in case anyone other than me was comparing us. Sometimes there's no point competing. Not that I could compete—my family situation meant I was disqualified from birth.

"I've been there every day with Mama," Blondie went on. "She's so worried about Nikos. He's her favorite, you know."

Wait—she called Kyria Mela 'Mama'? Holy cow, some people lived dangerously. I wanted to ask her if she called Mela's mother 'Mama' to her face, but even as a straight woman those boobs were distracting. She'd put them up on a shelf in that pillowcase she was wearing.

"That's what she told me," I mumbled.

"I heard two of the Germans are dead now," Hera went on. "The third one broke out."

"News travels fast."

“Police talk. Eventually I hear everything.”

“You’re a cop?”

Hera smiled. “Something like that.”

“Hera is an agent for the National Intelligence Service,” Irini told me in a bored voice.

“Allegedly,” Hera said. “ ‘Do not discuss confidential affairs.’ That’s the NIS’s motto.”

I wondered if she could walk on water. She and Melas were made for each other. A non-creepy Barbie and Ken, with present and functioning genitals.

Where were the drinks I was promised? I needed a dozen—stat.

As though she had a direct line tapped into my head, Irini clapped and squealed, “Ouzitos!”

“They sound lethal,” I said dubiously. From where I was sitting, oblivion sounded appealing.

“They’re delicious, that’s what they are. Ouzo, mint, sugar, and some other things. Shake, shake, shake and pour. Then drink.”

“Just one for me,” Hera said. “I’m driving.”

“What about you?” Irini wanted to know.

Hera was watching me. I felt like she had every intention of measuring and weighing my answer.

“Bring on the ouzitos,” I said.

Chapter 14

ELIAS TOOK THE WHEEL.

“I only had two!”

“Two ouzitos is like ten of any other drink. Can you feel your face?”

I jabbed my cheek with my finger. At least, I think I did.

“No ...”

He nodded. “Ouzitos.”

A dozen ouzo cocktails had sounded like a swell idea at first, but partway through the first round Hera had slowly begun to grill me. About myself, about Melas, about my family. So I pulled back and took the drinks one small sip at a time, while feeding her a steady supply of non-sequiturs and one-liners. Eventually she seemed to realize my head wasn't a database she could breach, so she sat back and let Irini regain control of the conversation.

Now we were on our way back to the compound—or trying to be. Not far from the Pappas house, the road was blocked by a wide butt with feet. Lopez was standing in the headlights, waving his arms.

“Is it me or is there just one of him?” I said to Elias.

“Hey” Lopez called out as we rolled to a stop. “Bishop's gone.”

The convertible's top was up, so I stuck my head out the window. “Gone where?”

“If I knew that he wouldn't be gone, would he?”

“He'd still be gone. The word you're looking for is ‘missing’.”

“Goddamn, you're a pain in the ass. Fine—Bishop is fucking missing, okay? That better? And before you ask, I looked all over—*nada*. You gonna help me now or what?”

“And I would help you ... why?”

“Because we're the same, you and me. Americans in a strange land.”

“Call the embassy. Lots of Americans there, same as you.”

“Come on, Miss Makris. You've got a big family. You know the cops here. Help me out, maybe I can help you out.”

“Help me out how?”

He did one of those lip-jutting moves to show he was considering how low or high he should bid. Finally he came to a decision. “A few bucks in my pocket, maybe I could make this thing with your Dad go away.”

“Oh my God, are you a dirty cop? Because you sound like a dirty

cop.”

He had the audacity to look offended. “What? No! I’m just sayin’ money has a way of changing fortunes. It can turn heads, make ‘em look in another direction.”

“Dirty cop.”

He stomped his boot on the dirt. A small dust cloud rose and fell around his feet. “I’m not a dirty cop. Just sometimes you gotta be flexible in this job when you’re working the back alleys. Flexibility means money or smarts. Probably you haven’t noticed but I’m not the sharpest knife in the drawer, so sometimes I gotta go with cash. But I’m still a guy you want on your side.”

“I can’t believe I’m going to do this,” I murmured.

“Don’t pay him,” Elias said in Greek.

I flashed him a grin. I dug around in my bag a moment and pulled out a business card for one Police Sergeant Pappas. “Call this number in the morning and tell him what you told me.”

Lopez looked at it like I’d dropped a turd in his hand. “What’s this?”

“It’s a cop’s number. A clean and honorable cop. Call him and he’ll help you. Maybe you’ll learn something.”

“But—”

“You hungry?” I said.

“Yeah, I could eat.”

I jumped back into the Beetle’s passenger seat. “Then get in. I’ll buy you dinner.”

“So when and how did Bishop go missing?”

“We were waiting on you. He went to take a whizz down at some abandoned house. There were a bunch of bushes and trees, real private, so he figured no one would see him. He never came back.”

“Did Timmy fall down a well?”

“It ain’t funny.”

It wasn’t funny but it was oddly poetic. Chances were good old Detective Bishop took a turn at the wrong bush and wound up sucking down Greek coffee in a stranger’s yard. It’s hard to care about a mosquito when it quits biting.

We cruised on down to the waterfront. The main street was a no-drive zone at this time of night, but the best place to grab souvlaki was hidden down a side street that wasn’t blocked off. Elias parked, then he ran into the tiny souvlaki joint with the order in his head. More perks of having a bodyguard—I could send him in to get food. I guess he figured I was safe enough with a cop riding in the backseat.

“Jesus.” Lopez gawked at the tiny shop, where it was standing room only and the bodies were three deep. “Is this place hygienic?”

The paint probably started its sentence on the wall as one of the paler shades of white. Now it was a fatty yellow from years—maybe even decades—of grease spatter and smoke that billowed up from the grills when someone didn’t pull the skewered meat off fast enough. Posters on the wall curled at the corners. The cook’s mustache dripped down his jowls and mouth. When rats and roaches died, this is where they believed they’d wind up. But the souvlaki was heaven stuffed in pita and wrapped in white greaseproof paper. One taste and the filth would fade away. It was all surface dirt anyway; deep down, where it mattered, this joint was *clean*.

“By the time you bite into the food you won’t care. It’s like one of the Oracle’s chocolate chip cookies in *The Matrix*—everything will be right as rain.”

Lopez gnawed on his bottom lip. “What’s healthcare like here? You know, just in case I get the runs.”

“Universal,” I said.

“No shit? Didn’t realize the Greeks were communists.”

I rolled my eyes, but it was lost on him, what with him being in the backseat.

“Didn’t you buy travel insurance?”

“Naw. It was one of those spur of the moment things. You were on the run and we had to follow.”

“Doesn’t your job pay for travel insurance? They sent you here, right?” The whole thing sounded kind of hinkey to me.

“Budget cuts are a fact of life these days. So any word from your old man?”

“Not since you got into my car.”

“You want to know what I think?”

“Not really.”

He ignored me. “I think you don’t have a clue where he is. Maybe he took off without telling you; maybe someone gave him a helping hand and made him vanish. Either way, you don’t know.”

“Parents do stuff without telling their kids all the time.”

“Not Mike Makris. I did some checking and I know you lost your mother. You and Mike, you’re what’s left and you’re tight.” He sucked air between his teeth. “He wouldn’t up and vanish without telling you unless he had no choice.”

“Why do you care?”

“You got any leads? I could maybe take a look at the situation, give you my professional opinion.”

“You just lost your partner while he was taking a leak. That’s not exactly a glowing endorsement of your skills.”

“What are you gonna do if your old man doesn’t show up?”

Just then, Elias emerged, steam rising from the bag in his arms. He looked sweaty and happy, which is how souvlaki always made me feel—especially this souvlaki.

“Say, that does smell kinda good,” Lopez said.

Elias dropped the bag on my lap, slid into the driver’s seat.

I had motives for being in this area, and they were ulterior. I wanted another sneak peek at Baby Dimitri’s shop. He was still open for business—tourists ate, drank, and then sometimes went shopping—and I knew he’d be sitting out front in his usual chair, watching the skirts walk by.

Once again, it was Baby Dimitri and Laki, no sign of the third man. They had their backs against the glass window, eyes sifting the crowd, looking for persons of interest, objects of lust, and potential customers. As a godfather of the night, Baby Dimitri specialized in nocturnal activities; sins of the flesh, scratches for very particular itches, and drugs. Grandma distributed drugs, too, but she refused to sell women. She believed women were capable of more ... like organized crime.

We blasted away from Baby Dimitri’s shop, down to Penka’s stoop. Still no sign of the Bulgarian dealer. I barely knew the woman but I suspected this wasn’t like her. She struck me as a rain-or-shine kind of gal. A few weeks ago her friend Tasha—a fellow dealer and occasional working girl—was executed by the Baptist, a serial killer who was getting his jollies wiping out police informants. I’d gone with Penka to her friend’s funeral. I’d picked her up at her apartment and dropped her home. I knew where she hung her extra-large hat. So I told Elias to take the next right and jag inland a couple of blocks.

Penka’s place was a second-story apartment in a white box. Every apartment had two tiny balconies—one off the living room and one off the kitchen. Dining al fresco wasn’t a possibility unless you didn’t mind eating standing up, alone. Like last time, the elevator was out of order. No sign, just a sad lack of movement or grinding noises when I stabbed the button a dozen times. I jogged upstairs with Elias following close behind. We’d left Lopez in charge of making sure no one stuck explosives—fake or not—in, on, or near my car. He didn’t know about Grandma’s criminal career, so I couldn’t exactly threaten to have him whacked if he didn’t sit and stay.

Once we reached Penka’s floor, I located her apartment door and knocked. The building was upper lower class but the hall was clean and the paint wouldn’t need freshening up for another year or so. Either peddling prescription drugs didn’t pay big or Penka was thrifty.

No answer. If Penka was home she was sleeping, in the bathroom, or binge-watching torrented TV shows, and therefore disinclined to

answer. On the far side of the door everything sounded quiet, although I couldn't be certain without a drinking glass for eavesdropping.

When we got back to the car, Lopez said, "You know what I can't figure out? I see you with all these different guys. Which one are you banging?"

"None of them."

"No, really, you can tell me."

"Okay," I said. "All of them."

"Damn," he said reverently. "All of them?"

"No. Jeez, I'm related to most of them. That's weird, even for Greece. This isn't exactly Alabama."

"What about this guy?"

I glanced at Elias. "Friend."

"You sure about that? Because he acts like he's something more."

"He's not."

"If you was to ask me, I'd say he acts like a bodyguard."

I relaxed and tensed up at the same time. "Huh. That's weird."

"And I'd have to ask myself why a girl like you would need a guy who acts like a bodyguard."

I turned around in my seat. "I thought you said you were stupid."

"Hey, that's not what I said. Not in those words, anyway. There's an awful lot of territory between not always the sharpest and the stupidest guy in the room."

"He's not a bodyguard," I said. "He's just a weirdo. Can't you tell by the outfit?"

"Thanks," Elias said in Greek.

"Necessity is the mother of invention and the cool uncle of lies." To Lopez: "Can we drop you somewhere?"

"Naw. My ride is back at your place behind a tree."

"I hope you marked it. Grandma's got a lot of trees."

He laughed like I was nuts. "Of course I remember. Can't be a cop without a memory like a bucket of razorblades."

Half an hour later: "Fuck. Fuck me to tears. I know I left it right here." There was movement in the trees. "Or maybe it was here."

Another half hour later: "Fuck. You know what I like about Greece? Leaving. And I ain't even fucking done that yet."

Ten minutes later: “Okay. Okay. I got it! Thank fuck.”

The compound’s courtyard was a place where anything could happen. Animals could leap out at you. Relatives, too. This late at night everyone was working their way towards bed, so there was quiet except for the usual ambient noise: the hum of the pool filter, the babbling fountains, the soft snuffling of dogs as they determined Elias and I were Elias and me—or however the grammar in that sentence was supposed to work.

Tonight, nothing happened. I was grateful. It was a day where too much had already happened. I didn’t need this much action in my life. Binge-watching Netflix my idea of a perfect night.

Grandma was in the kitchen nibbling on the edge of a *koulouraki* when I walked into her hovel. Her pupils were black saucers and it looked like she had a mild case of pinkeye.

“Be careful when you go into your room, eh? I put something in there for you.”

“Is it bigger than a breadbox?”

She looked at me, shook her head sadly. “You are my blood and my only granddaughter, but you can be a strange one. It is bigger than bread. And you can look, but do not touch.”

“Is it Melas?”

“Surprise,” she said. She kissed me goodnight and shuffled out to the outhouse. I made a mental note to talk to Aunt Rita about moving Grandma into the main building, where she wouldn’t have to go outside to the bathroom.

So Melas was here, huh? What did he want?

Sure enough, the detective was propped up on my bed, enjoying the comfort of my pillows. He crooked his finger at me, patted the bed.

Yeah, that was going to happen, especially now, when the memory of Hera, living goddess and she of the perfect boobs, was fresh in my head.

“You might have mentioned Hera is the living embodiment of Aphrodite, and also NIS.”

“Jealous?” He grinned. Yeah, that grin of his was definitely on the wicked side. He was already enjoying this and I wasn’t even fired up yet.

“Ha! No.”

“Because it sounds to me like you’re jealous. You’re even doing the

arm thing.”

“What arm thing?” I looked down. My arms were folded.

“The arm fold. Your body is screaming, *I’m jealous.*”

I scoffed at that. Okay, so I was a teensy bit envious that she was everything I wasn’t, but that didn’t mean I was jealous. They weren’t together anymore and Melas and I weren’t going places anyway. So what was my problem? I didn’t have one. So there. Very mature of me to be so practical about Hera, her boobs, and her goodie-two-shoes secret agent gig.

I prized my arms apart and dug around in my bag to show him just how not jealous I was. I tossed his phone on the bed. It landed with a soft plop.

“Just so you know, your mother tried to crack the code.”

The edges of his lips quirked. “She wouldn’t be my mother if she didn’t try.”

“For the record, I didn’t try.”

“I wouldn’t mind if you did.”

“I’m not that curious about you or your life.” Ha-ha. Good joke, Kat.

“Maybe I’d like you to be.”

I slouched against the dresser, as far away from him as I could get in this room. “Here we go again. Same old circle.”

“I like chasing you around the circle. You like it, too. Want to take a break and make out?”

There was a tap on the shutters. “No kissing or you will get the guillotine.” Grandma was out of the outhouse. A moment later I heard the kitchen’s screen door slap the frame.

Yes. “No.”

“Too much temptation?”

“Too much Grandma with sharp implements and guns. Too much common sense.”

“There’s nothing common about you, Katerina.”

He was laying it on thick, but I was too tired to bite. “Does Greece have a missing persons registry?”

He frowned. “Yeah, we have one. Why? Who’s missing?”

I told him about Penka and Bishop. That frown hardened. Goodbye lust, hello cop mode.

“A missing drug dealer isn’t strange around here—or anywhere. Hazard of the job. But the missing cop is weird. We don’t go down without a fight.”

“You think a professional grabbed him?”

“Wait—we don’t know that he was, yet. For all we know, him and his partner had a fight and he stormed off. Or maybe he got sick of following you around and went home.”

“Lopez seemed genuinely concerned. I gave him Pappas’s card and told him to call.”

Melas nodded. “Pappas is a good man and a good cop. He’ll help if he can—if it’s even necessary. Probably your guy has found himself a working girl. As for Penka, she’s been locked up before and she’s probably in the lockup now. And if she’s not careful she’ll get herself locked up someplace worse.”

“She only sells prescription drugs. It’s not like they’re *drug* drugs. There are levels ... or so I’ve heard.”

“Morally, maybe. But the law doesn’t care. It’s black or it’s white. Drugs are drugs. They’ll lock her up for life. In Penka’s case they’ll probably deport her to save Greece the money.”

I chewed on my lip. No flavor, zero calories. “Why did you and Hera break up?”

His frowned straightened up its act and sprawled into a lazy, satisfied grin. “Reasons.”

“Very descriptive.”

“Why did you and your last boyfriend break up?”

“Turned out we both liked men.”

He winced. “Not good.”

I shrugged off his concern. “Better to find out before than after the wedding.”

“Things with Hera were complicated,” he said. “We were both working a lot of hours. There wasn’t time to build anything.”

Oof. “So you’d be together if there was time?”

He laughed. “No. Look, Hera is gorgeous. She’s nice, too. And my family loved her. But it was never going to work. She wasn’t special to me.”

“Your mother still loves her.” He shot me a curious look. “Hera was at the hospital today. She was going as I was coming.”

The frown made a comeback. “She was at the hospital?”

“When I saw her at the Pappas house she told me she’d been there every day.”

“She doesn’t know it’s not me in the bed?”

“If she knows she didn’t say. She acted like it was really you. Why?”

“I haven’t seen Hera in a couple of years, not since it ended.”

“Volos isn’t that big a place, you don’t see her around?” And maybe bang her as a friends-with-benefits thing one in a while?

“She lives and works in Athens, which tells you why there was a time issue. Not exactly a local girl. There’s no reason for her to be here unless it’s family or business—and apart from Irini she doesn’t have family here.”

“So maybe she was visiting her sister.”

He laughed. "I said she was nice, not a saint."

"Why? What's wrong with Irini?"

"She's a handful."

I snorted. "I'd say two. And maybe an industrial strength bucket."

"Hera and Irini aren't close. They tolerate each other."

"They seemed fine to me."

"Well, maybe things have changed, although I doubt it's Irini. Anyway, you've got nothing to worry about with Hera. Right now she's here, but soon she'll be gone again."

"I'll be gone soon, too, as soon as I find Dad."

His voice softened. "I'm hoping you'll change your mind."

That was Melas, trying to transform something complicated into something easy, just for the sake of sex. "My life is there. My—" Job? Family? Home? I was temporarily unemployed after the collection agency I worked for burned down and its owner broke his legs. The only family I had in the states was Dad, and he was missing. As for my home, the home I knew was my parents' house. I had no roots of my own—just an apartment I hadn't moved into yet, and that had also not-so-mysteriously burst into flames.

I stifled a sniffle. I was in dire need of a time machine and I didn't know any mad scientists.

Melas looked mildly alarmed. "Are you ... crying?"

"Allergies."

He didn't look convinced. "What are you allergic to?"

"Greece. You. Everything. Pick one."

Time wandered onWards. Melas bailed, and eventually the sandman flicked a handful of dust in my face. When I woke, I was surprised that I'd fallen asleep at all. I slouched into the kitchen to find Grandma picking at the tablecloth.

"So how did it go with the guy you wanted me to meet?"

"You were not here," she said sourly.

"Yeah, I had somewhere to be. I did tell you."

"You could have cancelled."

"Would you have?"

"No. It is rude to cancel."

I raised my brows. "Oh really?"

"That is different," she said. "I am your grandmother. I want what is best for you."

"No. You want what is best for you and the Family, and if that turns out to be what's best for me ... bonus. If not, you think I'll get over it. Am I close?"

She made a non-committal sound that bore a distinct lean towards, Yes.

"I'm here because I want to be," I went on. "I'm here because from here I have a better shot at finding Dad. And when I've found him, I'm going home. I'm not here to hunt for husbands—especially not husbands chosen by someone else. This is all about Dad. I'm my own person, no matter who you are, no matter how powerful you are, no matter if you've got long squiggly arms that stretch all over the world, like Mr. Tickle."

"Who?"

I waved my hand. "He's a character in a children's book."

"Never heard of him."

"He's annoying."

"Like me, eh?"

Despite myself, I smiled. "Maybe a bit."

Pick, pick at the tablecloth. What she needed was a set of *koboloi*—worry beads. Although maybe that was a men-only thing; I wasn't sure.

"I was not always this way, Katerina. Once, I was a girl. A fool of a girl, with dreams of love and free will. Then my parents arranged for me to marry your grandfather."

Whoa! Who knew? Not me. "You could have turned him down."

"Different times, my girl. Different times. In those days you could stay and marry the wrong man, or run away."

"So you married the wrong man?"

"Who is to say? Then ... I thought so. Now ... who can say? Either way, it does not matter."

"Was there a right man?"

She scoffed at that. "Get out of here, Katerina. Go breathe fresh air. Swim. Relax a little, eh? You are wound tight."

"Who me?" I never thought of myself as a tense person before. Probably because ... oh ... I been pretty chilled before Grandma and Greece. This place and these circumstances were making me crazy.

"Who else? Maybe you should eat more of my special *koulourakia*, eh?" She winked.

Ha! Just what I needed. Greece was dangerous enough to navigate with all my faculties in order. Load me up with grass and booze and I'd wind up in the sack with Melas ... or in one of the tidy cells in the police building. It wouldn't be the first time. Melas had recently stuffed me into a cell for the crime of being annoying while being loud. I'd jumped on his desk and kicked stuff.

"Uh, no thanks," I said. "And you better not overdo it either. You were getting pretty friendly with the dogs and cats yesterday."

"I was not."

"There are pictures. Possibly even video."

"That was my evil twin." Her eyes twinkled.

"Oh, I wouldn't say evil. That Grandma was kind of funny. You're interesting without a filter."

She slapped the air. "Get out before I grab my broom. Then you will be sorry."

"Before I go, who was he? The guy, I mean. The one you wanted me to meet."

Mona Lisa hijacked her face for a moment to deliver one of those mysterious smiles. "You should have been here, Katerina. Maybe you will find out another time, eh?"

Hoping Marika had settled back into sidekick mode, I knocked. Takis yanked the door open. Someone had shoved his wiener in a socket, judging from the state of his hair. He had the wild-eyed, desperate look of a stay-at-home mom after a week of being snowed-in with her five children under ten.

"Where is Marika?" he demanded.

I peered past him. It was a jungle in there. Their kids had multiplied; now they were a horde. Mysterious stains had appeared on the walls. An unnatural stench hovered in the air, waiting to pounce and smother anyone who entered. I stepped back. The odor followed me out.

"She's not here?"

"Does it look like my wife is here, where she belongs?"

I thought about it. "Is this one of those trick questions?"

He slammed the door in my face. "When you see my wife, tell her to get her fat *kolos* home," he yelled.

My next stop was Stavros's apartment. He opened the door just a slit, bleary-eyed.

"If you were Marika, where would you be?" I asked him.

"Shopping."

"Shopping?"

"I like shopping."

I liked shopping, too, except when I had to do it. Then it was drudgery. But I didn't think Marika would be shopping, not without me. My heart fluttered with mild panic. Missing people all around me—Donk, Penka, Bishop—people no one would miss, except I was missing them, wasn't I?

But Marika ... People would miss her. She was Family.

I fired a text message at her phone and waited in the courtyard for a few minutes, hoping she'd reply. Zip. The last I'd heard she was

headed to church to pray for her sons' souls and futures. That was yesterday evening. For sure she'd go to Saint Catherine's in Makria. It was the closest church; the priest was practically Family. Makria was a short jaunt away, so I jumped into my car and came this close to fleeing without a bodyguard.

"Katerina!"

It was Elias. He was hanging out with the cousins in charge of the family fleet of cars, playing backgammon.

"I'm just going up to Makria. Enjoy your game," I said. "Makria is Grandma's town. I'll be fine."

Weren't those famous last words or something?

MAKRIA WAS one of those bucolic villages put on earth so that people could send postcards home and rave about how perfect Greece is. The tiny village had two main streets that met at perfectly crossed roads. To my knowledge, which was admittedly limited, nobody had sold their soul to the devil there. It was nothing more than a spot where you had four choices: go visiting, go celebrate and buy souvenirs at the village square, go to church, or get out of town.

When I reached Makria's crossroads Hera was standing there, looking cool in a white linen sheath and kitten heels. I hated kitten heels. They couldn't commit to being flats or heels, so they fell awkwardly somewhere in between, waiting to snap my ankle. That she made them seem comfortable, practical, and beautiful made me want to shove her off the mountain and watch her body hit every rock on the way down.

I ducked behind a spinning rack of postcards but it was too late—she'd spotted me and she was walking my way.

"Katerina? Buying postcards?"

"I collect them. Some people collect stamps, I collect postcards."

"Really? How many have you got?"

"Oh ..." I tried to sound vague and not at all like a lying ass. "About three hundred."

"Impressive. I collect men who won't commit." She laughed and touched a hand to her perfectly sleek French twist. Her hair was yellow, like a banana. "And men who complain that I won't commit."

"There's someone for everyone."

"Do you believe that?"

"My grandmother believes so."

Her face settled into an interested expression. "What's it like being Baboulas's only granddaughter? I've always wondered."

"Not sure yet. I'm new to the position. Wait ..." I looked at her. "Always wondered? I didn't know until a few weeks ago."

"As an alleged agent for the NIS, it's my job to know everything. Or it would be, if I worked for them. We—they—have the one of the biggest criminal databases in the world. What they don't know about Baboulas would fit on the head of a pin."

"That much, huh?"

She shrugged. I didn't know about launching ships, but I wanted to unleash a catapult at her face.

“Do you—they—know where my father is?”

“No.” She glanced at the gold watch coiled around her wrist. “Look, Katerina, can I ask what you think you’ve got going on with Nikos?”

“You can ask.”

“Then I’m asking.”

“Nothing. Less than nothing. He’s law enforcement, and like it not, my family is ...” My voice trailed off as I made a lame attempt to sum them up. “...what they are. I’m not any kind of intelligence agent but I’m smart enough to know when something wouldn’t work.”

“Good,” she said. “Because when Nikos is up out of that bed I have exciting news for him. Wouldn’t want anyone else getting in the way.”

I stood in stunned silence for a moment before recovering. “Bitchy.”

“You have no fucking idea.”

“He said you were nice.”

“I am nice. Ask anyone, bitch.” Then she had the audacity to smile. Where was Marika with her bag of guns when I needed her?

“Katerina?”

Holy cow, I had superpowers. Here was Marika, barreling along the path from Saint Catherine’s, big bag of guns hanging from her shoulder. As she neared us she ripped the submachine gun out and aimed it right at Hera. My fantasies were coming true. Marika was Santa, the Tooth Fairy, Easter Bunny, and whoever brought Greek children presents.

“Don’t move. Step away from Katerina.” To me she said, “I have been watching this one. She is a problem.”

Didn’t I know it?

Hera laughed. “I’m a problem? You’re the one holding a very nasty weapon. Do you know how to use that thing? It’s more complicated than turning on a washing machine.”

Marika sucked in her breath. “Are you calling me a ... housewife?”

Shrug. “If the apron fits.”

Marika’s eyes widened. Her face was turning pimento red. “Apron? Maybe if you put on an apron you could keep a man, eh?”

“Don’t go thinking an apron will help you,” Hera told me. “Nikos is mine.”

“Well, you’d better tell him that,” I said.

Marika poked the air with the gun’s barrel. “Want me to shoot her?”

“No,” I said. “Don’t waste the bullets. I don’t want your kids growing up without a mother.”

“Good, because I have been trying to fire this thing the whole time and I think”—She swung the submachine gun around and stared into

the long, narrow barrel—"this one is defective."

I hit the deck. "Stop waving that thing around. And don't point it at yourself, for crying out loud!"

"Never aim a gun at something you don't intend to shoot," Hera said. "Like this." She stuck her hand in her shoulder bag, dug out some kind of kinky sex toy, aimed it at Marika. Two wires shot out of the end and buried themselves in Marika's floral dress. She yelped and flopped face first on the ground.

"It's a Taser designed specially for the NIS." Hera rolled Marika over with her foot, gave her a little nudge. Then she unhooked the barbs and stashed her mega-bitch toy back in her bag. "Or so a little birdie told me."

"You shot my bodyguard."

"That's your bodyguard?" She laughed like a hyena. Not perfect after all. "Baboulas must want you dead if that's the best she gave you. What happened to the guy from last night?"

"He's playing backgammon back at the compound."

"Very professional." She laughed again and poked Marika with her stupid kitten heeled shoe. "See you around, Katerina. But hopefully nowhere near Nikos."

"Those shoes give you cankles," I said.

"Cankles?"

I did my best to explain. She grinned. "Nice try, chubby cheeks." Then she sashayed out of town. Bitch.

I crouched down beside Marika. "Are you okay?"

She sat up. "Where are all my loved ones?"

"Back at the compound?"

"Shouldn't they be here to greet me?"

"You know you're not dead, right?"

She glanced around, shifty-eyed. "I knew that. I was just testing you. What happened to the crazy stick insect? Did she go to vomit up the air she ate for breakfast?"

I helped her up off the ground, smiled at the concerned faces watching us. "She caught the Broomstick Express out of here."

"I hate her. I remember last time she was sniffing around Detective Melas like a she-dog with two *mounis*. Wait ..." She looked up at me. "What is she doing here? Are they back together?"

"According to him, no. But she said she has exciting news for him." The curiosity was overwhelming. So was the green-eyed monster. It was on my shoulder, chanting, Mess up her hair, crush her self-esteem! Most of me liked what it was saying.

"Exciting news, my *kolos*. She should do the world a favor and jump into a live volcano."

"Why don't you like her? I mean, I get it. I just met her and I hate

her guts.”

“I do not trust her. She is sneaky like the fox. If she is here she is up to no good—the worst kind of no good: the legal kind.” Her arm threaded through mine. “Do you have any money? It is not payday yet so I have no money, but I am dying for coffee and a little cake. Are you buying?”

“I’m buying.”

“I am glad we are family and you need a bodyguard. I would hang out with you anyway, but it is good to get paid. I am like a new woman.”

“Can I ask you something? Are my cheeks chubby?”

“Only when you lean over. Gravity is not a woman’s friend.”

Two frappes and a chunk of baklava the size of her head later, Marika slouched back in her chair and patted her belly. “What were you doing up in Makria, besides getting rescued by me of course.”

“I was looking for you.” I gave her a quick rundown of the current list of missing persons, including how I’d been scared shitless she was one of them.

“That does not sound to me like a coincidence.”

“I don’t think so either. Where were you?”

“Church.”

“All this time?”

“I went back at dawn this morning to pray for my period. It is late.”

“Marika!”

She waved a hand like her problem was smoke. “Probably it is stress from flying to America and finding that dead policeman. And now I have a stressful job, too. My body wants to conserve blood. I am using all I have got.”

“Marika!”

“Anyway, when I am pregnant I eat, eat, eat like a wild dog.” She signaled for the waiter. “Can you bring me another baklava? And one to take with me.”

“Marika.”

She looked at me. “What?”

“That baklava is the size of your head.”

“No, it was not that big.”

“Yeah, it was.”

The waiter trotted out with another pastry head-on-a-plate.

“I will hold it up next to my head,” Marika said, relieving the waiter of the dish. “You take a photo.” She held the plate up while I

snapped a picture with my cellphone.

I handed it over. "See? As big as your head."

"Optical illusion. Perspective is everything. That is how they did the special effects in *The Lord of the Rings*."

"Marika."

"I cannot be pregnant."

I wanted agree that Takis shouldn't be allowed to breed, but they had a passel of boys already. Boom! Theory shot down.

"Did you take a test?"

"No, I wanted to give God a chance to intervene first."

I went to stand but she grabbed my arm. "Wait. First I have to eat this, and then I need to convene with the old gods. If that does not work out, I will change religions and find a god who does deals."

"I don't think there is one."

"How about Hindus? They have a god for everything."

"No ..."

"Islam?"

"You need a god favorable towards women's rights."

"You are right. The Egyptian gods it is. Don't you have something to do in Egypt? Could be they are keeping your father in one of those pyramids."

"Anything is possible."

She clicked her fingers. "That is what I love about you—you are an optimist."

"And if you are pregnant?"

"Impossible. I have all those boys already. God would not be so cruel."

Probably it wouldn't be helpful if I began listing all the times God was cruel in the Bible. We'd be here for days, and eventually Marika would drain the coffee shop's dessert supply.

"Okay, let's say you're not pregnant ... you should still probably go home and put your feet up."

"Mothers do not put their feet up. Anywhere you can put your feet there are toys and mess."

"Well, I'm not taking you to do anything potentially dangerous. Not until you know for sure."

"How is it dangerous to ask a few questions?"

Her logic seemed sound. Also, I was pretty sure it was some kind of discrimination to tell a possibly pregnant woman she couldn't do the job she was being paid to do. "I guess it couldn't hurt to ask some questions."

"Exactly. Where do we start?"

I gnawed on it a moment.

"First person to vanish was Donk. Let's try his place."

“Where does he live?”

Baby Dimitri and Laki cackled like a pair of hyenas.

“Missing?” the godfather said. “Ha! My nephew is not missing. The *malakas* is probably asleep somewhere. Have you checked the strip clubs?”

“Which clubs? A starting point would be useful.”

“All of them. But not mine. He’s barred from my clubs.”

“What did he do?”

“He’s a teenager! They are terrible tippers. He goes there and the girls complain. Last thing I need is my girls complaining when they’re being paid to shut up and dance.”

Probably it’s hard to be generous with strippers when you’re spending your allowance. “How about his address? I need to talk to his mother.”

Baby Dimitri snorted. He hooked a thumb at me and glanced at Laki. “Can you believe this one?” To me: “Give me your phone.” I handed it over and he typed for a moment then tossed it to me. “Good luck. You will need it with my sister. I give her money because she has no husband, no skills, and no ability to keep her legs shut, and what does she do?”

“Is that a rhetorical question?” I asked.

“Men. All the men. Ask the boy, she has probably seen his friends naked.”

“She is a *putana*,” Laki said, flashing his mouthful of gold.

The Godfather of Nights and Thingmabobs shot him a dirty look. “Hey, that’s my sister you’re talking about.”

“Sorry, boss.”

“He’s right,” Baby Dimitri said to me, “she’s a *putana*. Only she’s too lazy and stupid to make it a job. She gives it away for free.”

“Where’s your friend today?”

“What friend?”

“The guy who was here the other day?”

“Him? Eh, he’s around. Usually when you least expect it. Now go, get out of here. Unless you need some shoes.” He gave me a sly look. “You need shoes?”

I glanced down at my feet. It was hot but I’d shoved my feet into a pair of boots anyway. They looked 90s grunge cute with my dress. Or so I hoped.

“I’m good.”

“What about your friend, she need shoes? She looks like she goes through a lot of shoes.”

Marika shifted straight into defensive mode. "What is that supposed to mean? Are you saying I'm fat?"

"I'm saying I know who you are and that you've got a bunch of boys. Running after boys, shoes wear out fast. What can I say?" He did two palms up. "I know shoes. One of my ancestors was a cobbler."

"Did he have elves?" I said.

He looked confused. "What are you talking about?"

"Kindly fairytale creatures who helped him make shoes."

"This is Greece," Baby Dimitri said, "no elves. Zeus would have fucked them and sent them home."

"He is right," Marika said. "If it moved, Zeus put his sausage in it."

Everyone knew about Zeus. "You know you're missing a dealer, too, right?"

"The Bulgarian?" He shrugged. "Maybe she slept in."

"Last night? Yesterday? The day before? It's not like Penka. She loves money."

"If she loves money so much, where is she with my product, eh?"

"That's what I'm saying. She's missing. And maybe you'll find this interesting, but she and your nephew aren't the only people who've gone missing lately."

"Maybe your grandmother took them." He tossed the words out casually; even he didn't believe that.

"Maybe your German buddy did."

"Who said he was German?" He looked at Laki. "Did I say he was German?"

"No, boss."

I pressed on. "Does he have something to do with the counterfeit money floating around town?"

"How would I know? Nobody tells me anything."

"And yet you know everything," I said, stroking his ego a tiny bit.

He shrugged. "Eh ... I am a good listener, that is all."

"You told me not to come back for a while. Why not?"

"Katerina Makris-with-an-S, do I look like an information booth? Because last time I looked I was successful businessman. I am somebody around here, not a little man in a funny hat who gives directions to every pretty girl who wiggles her *kolos* at me."

"I never wiggled."

"Maybe not at me, but you wiggle. I will give you some free information. This is the last bit you will get from me. I do not shit where I eat. It's not hygienic. I could catch a disease, shit, vomit, like people in third world countries."

"Cholera," Laki said.

"Cholera," Baby Dimitri agreed. "If I shit where I eat, I get the cholera. I don't want the cholera. I like being a businessman, being

alive, watching the girls from my shop. It's a nice life. You see what I'm saying? Your eyes fourteen, Katerina. Keep your eyes and ears open. Be smart. Do some math in your head, eh? Don't make me shit where I eat. And when you find my nephew, kick his *kolos*."

"And Penka?"

"You kick her *kolos* it will take all day," Laki said.

Somehow—I blamed the gods—between Baby Dimitri's shop and Donk's house we picked up a leech.

"Would it hurt you to drive slower?" Lopez demanded when we stopped. "This piece of shit can't keep up."

"If I go any slower they'll run me off the road." I eyed the moped. "Why don't you trade that for a skateboard? It'll move faster."

"You got a smart mouth, anyone ever told you that?" He didn't wait for an answer. "What's this place anyway, and how's it gonna help me find Gene?"

"It's a starting place," I said.

Donk and his mother lived in a configuration of white boxes on boxes next to boxes, in a style real estate agents back home called *modern*. To me it looked like the kind of place they filmed porn. The driveway was cluttered with vehicles. The only life forms around were cacti and succulents, plant life that thrived on neglect.

Trudging up the gravel driveway, I felt overdressed. Too much underwear, not enough glitter. Marika and Lopez slouched silently along behind me. I wondered if they were feeling overdressed, too. Ask me, you couldn't cover Lopez up enough. We crowded onto the smooth cement porch at the foot of a sleek metal door.

The doorbell bing-bonged.

"You need any help asking the right questions, you let me know," Lopez said. "I'm experienced."

"So am I," I said. "I'm a bill collector."

Truthfully, as bill collectors went I was on the toothless side and not a fan of trickery, lies, or threats. Mostly I relied on good manners. Somehow I'd managed to get results.

There was movement inside. Eventually, the door opened and a bleary eyed woman shoved her face to the slit. Her skin said mid-thirties. Her hair stuck out at unnatural angles. It was a glossy shade of Elvira black. Last night's smoky makeup was this morning's domestic violence.

"You three look like a joke," her pack-a-day voice said. "We're trying to make a movies here—what do you want?"

Cheap sports cars in the driveway. A souvlaki delivery moped. I

could guess what kind of movies they were making.

"Is Donk home?" I asked her.

"Donk?" She laughed. "Fuck the Virgin Mary, the things that boy calls himself. I gave him a good name—my father's name, because who knows where his father is—and what does he do? Makes up a new one." Her eyes narrowed. "What do you want with Yiorgos?"

"I'm kind of his mentor. He didn't show up today."

Her eyes slid from me, to Marika, to Lopez, and landed back on me again. "Who are you? Is my boy mixed up in some weird sex thing?"

This from the woman running a porn set in her house. Hell, for all I knew she was the star. It's not like porn has standards.

"Katerina Makris. Probably you've heard of my grandmother."

Her lipstick-smudged mouth sagged an inch before snapping back into position. Then she gave a slow, lazy smile and looked me up and down. She held the door open. "You want to come in? You could make yourself some serious money with your name and that face and body."

Lopez said, "What's she saying?"

"American, eh?" Donk's mother said in English. "You want to be in a movie, too?"

"Sure," he said. "I like movies. What kind of movies?"

"Fun movies. Lots of sex and adventure." She wiggled her eyebrows suggestively. "You get paid double if you don't mind taking it up the—" Her gaze traveled to his butt.

Lopez let out a whimper.

"He's an American policeman," I said. "Vice."

The vulpine smile widened. "Perfect. We could remake *The Godfather*. Do you mind dominating men? Beating them? Stomping on their balls in high heels? We could call it *Katerina's Way*. Or, *Scarballs*."

"*Snatch*?" I said.

"You're good at this," she said. Her gaze slid to Marika, who was wide-eyed. "I suppose we could use a new fluffer," she said. "Our old one is getting carpal tunnel surgery."

Marika hugged her bag and hurried down the driveway, shooting worried glances over her shoulder in case the big, bad porn stars were coming after her.

Donk's mother shrugged. "Guess she doesn't want the job. All that lube makes the hands so soft though."

"So your son isn't here then?"

"Yiorgos does not approve of my career. And my brother does not know about it, so keep that mouth of yours shut or I'll put it to good use."

Baby Dimitri didn't know? Funny, I figured he wouldn't have

mind dipping his toes in the porn business. And he sounded like he'd be pleased his sister was showing some financial initiative.

My memory banks chimed. "There's a rumor that your brother killed all his siblings."

She laughed. "That's not a rumor, my doll. They are all dead, except me. I'm a half sister and no threat to his business. So here I am, making my little movies."

Using Baby Dimitri's allowance money, no doubt. And I thought my family had issues.

"Any idea where your son might be?"

"School."

"It's August—no school."

She fanned her face with her hand. "That must be why it's so hot. Try his friends."

"Who are his friends?"

A giant wiener swung into the picture. I couldn't be sure, but I think it was attached to a man. "We're waiting on you," the salami said.

I tried to look away but ... God, it was really hot out here.

Donk's mother followed my line of sight and grinned. "I don't know who the kid hangs out with. That's his business. Got to get back to the set. Come back if you want some big, easy money. Baboulas's granddaughter ... the world would go crazy for it. You could be famous."

Wow ... and they said there were no jobs in Greece. I'd been offered two so far: crime lord and porn star. Made me question what vibe I gave off that people thought I'd be amenable.

"So," Lopez said as we set off down the driveway. "Did you get anything?"

"I nearly got crabs, does that count?"

The look on his face said it didn't.

Poor Donk. I really felt for the kid. Mommy was a deadbeat porn actress and his uncle was a mobster. No wonder he was a flake.

"Where are we going to find this kid's friends?" I said.

Lopez looked up and down the street. The house behind us was a misfit in a street of family homes. Kids bouncing basketballs. Women sweeping concrete yards. A couple of old biddies staggering with five gallon bottles, inbound from the nearest spring water faucet.

"If it were me I'd ask a kid," he said.

"That's what I was thinking."

"You ever think about being a cop?"

"Sure. I also think about flying to the moon to excavate cheese."

Lopez shook his head. "You're a piece of work."

"Okay," I said to Marika in Greek. "Pick a kid and we'll ask him if

he knows Donk's whereabouts or his friends."

"Donk has friends?"

"Give the kid a break. His family sucks donkey dicks. Possibly his mother does it literally."

We picked a couple of kids, early teens, wearing knockoffs of a popular sports label—TRIKE: Just Go It—tossing a basketball at what used to be a garbage can lid. Someone had punched out the middle, leaving a sharp metal ring. Greek parenting around here mostly involved booting your kid outdoors and warning them not to show up until lunchtime, chased by a second warning that their deaths would be impending if they didn't show up to the table the second the food hit the table. Everything else was degrees of apathy, or so it seemed. It was a country built on Darwinism. The fittest survived; the rest emigrated.

"Hey," I said to the pair. "Do you know a kid who calls himself Donk?"

They exchanged glances. Was I a cop? A weirdo sex fiend preying on teenage boys? A truant officer? Did Greece even have truant officers? Then they smirked. They'd obviously decided on the second one ... until they got a load of Marika and Lopez. "Why?" one of them said. "Did he beat up their kid?" He nodded to my companions.

Marika sniffed. "My sons do not get beaten up—they do the beating. Unfortunately. Their father and I are trying to break the habit."

The kids backed off fast. "We don't know where he is. He's too good to hang with us anymore."

"He have any other friends around here?"

They jerked their chins up and both went, *Tst*. "Hey, we saw you come from Donk's house. You going to be in one of his mama's movies?"

"Ugh. No. Just ... just ... go home and watch The Disney Channel!"

They smirked and went back to their game.

I scanned the neighborhood, hand shielding my eyes. Something told me we'd get nothing no matter who we asked. That same something told me Donk wasn't off with friends or strippers or stripper friends.

I made a decision. Melas had blown me off when I told him Penka was missing, but something besides Lopez stunk.

"Whatever happens next, you have no jurisdiction, remember?" I said to Lopez.

He held up his hands. "Hey, so long as you find Gene you won't get any complaints out of me. Scout's honor."

Yeah right.

We drove to Penka's apartment building. I wanted a look inside

her place to see if anything was amiss. If she was snatched did it happen there? Was there sign of a struggle? Had someone maybe left a ransom demand? Basic stuff.

When I broke into Melas's house the first time, I'd used a makeshift lock pick out of thick wire. Now I had my own set of real lock picks, a gift from Aunt Rita. She felt every woman should have an exit strategy, in case the sexcapades turn bad. Part of the basic personal security measures she'd enacted after reading *Gerald's Game*. My family was nothing if not practical. I had a feeling my mother would have liked Aunt Rita.

I pulled out those real lock picks, handed Marika my phone. She leaned against the wall, dark eyes scanning the gloom for things she could shoot, while holding the phone up so I could follow the instructions on YouTube.

"What are you doing?" Lopez wanted to know.

"That depends. What does it look like I'm doing?"

"Breaking and entering."

"Just the first bit." The lock made a soft snick. "Now we can do the entering."

"Shit," Lopez said. "That's on YouTube?"

"Everything is on YouTube."

He grumbled something about how the Internet was making a cop's job harder than it was in the old days. Then I pointed out how the Internet was making it easier for the police to hunt people down like dogs. Case in point: me. And he said that wasn't the Internet, that was aviation.

"He never shuts up," Marika said. "You got any food in your bag?"

"What happened to that third piece of baklava?"

"I already ate it. Being a bodyguard is hungry work."

I looked in my bag. Nothing food-like except some old receipts and lint. Too bad she didn't have pica. "We can stop somewhere when we're done here."

"No problem. I will look in the refrigerator."

Lopez hovered in the hall. "I can't believe we're doing this."

"If it makes you feel any better, the woman who lives here is a drug dealer."

"Okay," he said, "I'm in. What are we looking for?"

"What do you usually look for when someone's missing?"

"Signs of struggle, signs of anything suspicious or helpful."

"Great," I said. "Do that then."

Penka lived simply, only she did it in red and purple. Red couch, purple cushions, red rug. The walls were a faded crimson. I felt like a scope in a urologist's office. These colors make me happy, Penka had said when I came to pick her up for Tasha's funeral and I commented

that she lived in a urethra.

Marika launched herself at the refrigerator, foaming at the mouth. If she was pregnant Greece's food supply was doomed. Lopez took the single bedroom. I wandered around the combination dining and living room, looking for anything out of place in an apartment I'd visited once. Everything looked fine to me, except the conspicuous absence of its inhabitant. On the kitchen wall hung a little plastic rack that held bills. Flicking through, I could tell everything was paid on time.

"Find anything?" I asked the others.

"Nothing," Marika said in disgust. "Tomatoes and cheese."

"I like tomatoes and cheese," I said.

"This job demands real food. Something that will fill me up and stick to my bones."

I didn't think the job demanded much of anything except carrots to help with her eyesight. "Anything will stick to your bones if you eat enough of it."

"I am going downstairs. I think I saw a *periptero* on the corner."

A *periptero* was a boxy pavilion that sold newspapers, magazines, cigarettes, and junk food. You couldn't throw a rock without hitting one. Which was a funny coincidence, because it seemed to be a national law that only pet rocks could man them. They were unofficially designated no-smile zones.

"Wait—" I started, but she was gone. Marika didn't have a grip on the whole bodyguard thing yet. My body was here with the tomatoes and cheese.

Lopez wandered back into the living room. "You find anything?"

"Nope."

"Me either. She say anything to you that would make you think she'd go missing?"

I thought about it. "She said Baby Dimitri came to her a week or so back and tried to convince her to push some kind of new product."

"Some kind of drugs?"

"Yeah. I think it must be a German thing." I was doing math and coming up with numbers. But were they the right numbers? Hard to say. Everyone had a disability; math was mine. "Melas said the Germans were trying to distribute something new, similar to sisa."

"Sisa?"

I explained sisa. Cocaine for the poor. Cheap. Easy to get. Fried the brain.

"Like meth then."

"Pretty much."

"And this dealer wouldn't move it?"

"She only deals prescription drugs. There are levels."

He snorted. "You keep telling yourself that, sister. Prisons back

home are full of people like your Bulgarian friend.”

There was noise in the hallway, and Marika reappeared. “Katerina ...” she said. She was on the wrong end of a gun. When the gunman came into focus, I exhaled. Volos cops. I didn’t know their names but I remembered their faces. Melas’s department.

“We got a report someone was robbing this apartment,” one of them said.

“Fuck, I hate this,” Lopez said. “What are they saying?”

I ignored him. “Penka’s a friend,” I said in Greek. “She’s missing, so I came looking for her.”

“That’s not what the caller said. They said you broke in. You got a key?”

Uh ... “Not exactly a key. Does a key-shape count?”

“You can’t arrest her,” Marika said. “She’s Katerina Makris.”

“I know who she is,” the one cop said. “I was there when she kicked all the stuff off Detective Melas’s desk. Great show.” He grinned. “Still got to bring you in.”

“What about my missing friend?”

“Penka’s your friend?” They glanced at each other, laughed. “Probably they hauled her in for selling drugs again. Happens every other week. I bet she’s down at the station now.”

I doubted that. “Do we have to wear the cuffs?”

“Depends. Are you going to make a run for it?”

“Nope.”

“What about them?”

Marika gave him a dirty look. “Cuff me and I will shoot you.”

Five minutes later we were all in the back of the police car. I was in the middle. Marika and Lopez were wearing shiny cuffs; identical to the ones I had back at Grandma’s place.

“How come you’re not cuffed?” Lopez wanted to know.

“Just lucky, I guess.”

Something was niggling, but I couldn’t catch it by the tail.

Chapter 16

THE LOCKUP WAS EMPTY, so they separated us into Boys and Girls. I let Marika take the bed on account of how she was probably pregnant. Her feet were overburdened at the best of times; now she was potentially walking for two. I stood at the bars, face smushed between them, probably bearing an uncanny resemblance to a basset hound. I would have sung the blues but I didn't want to get popped for noise pollution.

"They can't charge me with anything," Lopez grumbled in the next cell. "I'm one of them."

"A foreign cop, with no jurisdiction."

"Still," he said, "no professional courtesy?"

"I don't think they have that here. Not for breaking and entering."

"I didn't do the breaking, just the entering. Whatever you get I should only get half."

I was pretty sure it didn't work that way in any country, but what did I know?

"Screw this," he said, slumping against the bars. He slid downwards until he looked like something out of my old geometry books. "As soon as I get a phone call I'm calling my boss. He'll get me out of this."

"Isn't he too busy with the whole dead-cop-in-his-trunk thing?"

"Yeah, yeah, that's right. Fuck. Fuckin' Bishop, this is his fault. It was his idea to follow you here."

"Really? You seem like the ringleader."

"You think?" He sounded hopeful.

"Definitely."

"Naw. I got a bigger mouth, that's all."

Marika sat up. "I could eat a whole sheep. I am going to call that souvlaki delivery guy we saw earlier. Do you have money?"

I blinked. "Souvlaki delivery guy? I don't think he really delivers souvlaki."

"Then why was he riding around on a souvlaki delivery bike?"

I looked at her. She looked back.

"Don't you watch—"

"I admit nothing," she said. "I am a good Greek woman."

Somehow I doubted that. "Wait—where did you get a phone?"

She looked confused. "My pocket?"

"Give me that." I held my hand out. "Please."

She tossed the phone to me. "Who are you calling?"

"Aunt Rita."

"No! Don't call the family. Takis will never shut up for the rest of his life."

"So, five minutes then?"

She shrugged. "If he is lucky."

If I couldn't call family, there was no one else. Marika didn't have Melas's number programmed into her phone, and I couldn't remember it. Hazard of the modern age where there are no numbers, only gadgets that do the remembering for you. Melas was in my phone as Detective Beefcake. I scrolled through Marika's contacts. Every name in there was family.

"I will die if I do not eat soon," Marika said. "Do they serve lunch, do you think?"

"Sure. Three courses." I passed her phone back. "Any ideas how we can get out?"

"We could ask nicely."

I asked Lopez the same question and he shook his head.

"Unless you can shimmy out that window, we're stuck here," he said. "And with those hips you're not going anywhere."

"What's wrong with my hips?"

"Nothing, Jesus Christ. It was a compliment." He looked up. "I suppose someone tall enough could get through the ceiling tiles." He hauled himself off the floor, climbed onto the bunk and pushed at the cheapo squares. It popped out. "Greece's financial problems are our salvation," he said. Then he hoisted himself up and into the hole. They were big squares. He stuck his head through. "Got to check which way is out. Don't want to go crawling over a bunch of cops. They're armed—I should know." Then he vanished again. The ceiling groaned.

We waited.

And waited.

"Huh," I said. "He never did say he was going to get us out, too, did he?"

We waited some more.

Marika eyed the pillow, possibly inspecting it for signs of edibility. "I will shoot him just as soon as we get out of here and I get my guns back."

I walked to the adjoining wall of bars, stared longingly up at the hole in the ceiling. "Lopez?"

"It's dark up here," he called out. "Got to wait until my eyes adjust."

That seemed fairish.

The door flew open. Police Sergeant Pappas to the rescue.

"I heard you were in here," he said to me. "Irinis would kill me if

she knew we had you locked up.” He looked around. “Where is the fat one?”

I pointed up at the ceiling. Screw Lopez and the moped he rode in on.

Pappas grinned. He stuck his head out the door. “We’ve got one in the ceiling, boys!”

“Why?” I asked. “What’s in the ceiling?”

“Limited funding, so we added our own security measures.”

“Security measures?”

His grin spread. “You want coffee?”

“How about cake?” Marika wanted to know. “If you are passing out cake with that coffee I will take two pieces.”

“Coffee sounds great,” I said.

“And cake,” Marika reminded him.

“Coffee and cake,” he muttered. He left the room. When he came back it was with two coffees, no cake, and the whole department. They crowded in, eyes on the ceiling like a mob of meerkats.

“Wait for it,” someone muttered.

There was a long pause. Then Lopez said, “Yeah, still dark up here. I’m gonna go for it anyway. Eventually I’ll hit an outside wall.”

The joists sang out as he shifted his weight.

Overhead, something snapped, metal clanking against wood. Then another snap. Lopez shrieked, girlish and high. There was a thud, followed by several more snaps and squealing.

“That is one determined rat,” Police Sergeant Pappas said, slapping his belly. The crowd roared; police humor.

“Oh fuck,” I heard Lopez say. He banged on the outside wall. Nothing happened.

“That should take care of your stalker problem,” Pappas said. “How did you pick these guys up?”

“They’re American cops. They followed me here.”

“*Ai so dialo*,” he swore. “Somebody get him down from there. The last thing we need is the American Embassy riding us for detaining one of their policemen.”

My mouth hung open.

Pappas snorted. “I’m joking. No one will care. But we have to get him down anyway; fewer traps to reset. We like to leave that tile loose on purpose.” He looked apologetic and slightly pathetic. “We don’t have much entertainment around here. That thing you did on Melas’s desk was exciting by our standards.”

Ten minutes later, a sorry-looking Lopez slid through the original hole, back into the cell. “Fuck tha police,” he said. “That’s what Gene would say. He’s into that rap shit. Ask me, the c in rap is silent.”

“Bishop is the police. So are you.”

“Vice cop. There’s a difference.”

I didn’t see one.

Pappas had vanished. He came back in, looking marginally happier. “You can go. The owner of the building vouched for you, said you had a right to be there.”

“Really? Who’s the owner?”

He pushed the door open with his finger. In walked Xander. Did I say walk? I meant swaggered. Definitely swaggered. It went with the amused glint in his eyes. For a guy who didn’t speak he could sure say a lot.

Oh boy.

“Grandma owns Penka’s apartment building? Did you know this?” I asked Marika.

“Baboulas owns a lot of things. It is very difficult to keep track. Maybe only your Aunt Rita knows all the places, seeing as she is the Family accountant.”

Xander drove us back to the compound. The wretch made Marika and I sit in the back while the chunky cop got to sit up front. I wanted to blame sexism but I knew it was because I hated Xander’s music and tried to change the station one freakin’ time. As soon Xander cut the engine outside the archway, I hopped out. Lopez climbed out, too.

“Someone want to give me a ride back to my moped? It’s outside your dealer friend’s apartment building.”

Xander nodded in the direction of the garage. While we were wasting away in jail, someone had brought our vehicles back to the compound. They’d even scored a complementary wash. Which was probably a bad idea—the only thing holding the moped together had been dirt and metal memory.

“Well,” Lopez said, “I’d like to say it’s been fun, but it’s been a lot of things and fun ain’t one of ‘em. And we’re still not any closer to finding Gene. So what’s the next move?”

“I don’t know that there is one,” I told him. “Not for me. You need the police. I’m just a kid from Portland, Oregon.”

He stared at me thoughtfully. “Yeah, I don’t think that’s all you are. You got some kind of weird woo-woo power around here. You and your whole family. Say, are you royalty?”

I laughed out loud.

“Well, I’ll see you around,” he said. “Let me know if your friend and that kid show up. Maybe Gene is with them. And who knows, maybe he hopped a ferry to Mykonos.”

Except Lopez wasn’t going anywhere. Xander stepped in front of him, barring the way with his beefcake.

Holy hamburgers, Batman!

Takis swaggered out from the cool shade of the arch. “Excuse us,

Mr. Po-lees-man,” he said in English. “But the family matriarch is inviting you to be our guest for a little while longer.”

“Guest?” Lopez scratched the back of his neck. “The way you’re saying it that don’t sound voluntary.”

“Oh heck,” I groaned. I shifted back to Greek. “You’re not putting him in the dungeon, are you? Say you’re not putting him in dungeon.”

Takis shrugged. “Where else you want to put him? In the main house? Baboulas would have a fit.”

“What’s the problem?” I eyed the cop’s round gut and the Hawaiian shirt tented over his middle. “I mean he’s a creep, but is that a crime?”

“Baboulas has a feeling about this one.”

“What sort of feeling?”

“You want to get me killed, eh? Let Xander and me do our jobs. You got a problem with this, take it to Baboulas.”

Lopez’s head was doing the tennis match thing, back and forth. “What’s this ‘Baboulas’? You keep saying it over and over.”

“It means Boogeyman,” I said. “It’s a nickname.”

He pulled out his phone. “Sounds suspicious to me. I’m gonna look that one up.” A moment later: “Huh. It’s a nickname all right. Did you know there’s a mob boss in Greece they call Baboulas?”

We all looked at him.

“How about that,” I said.

Lopez’s eyes cut from his phone to the compound’s fancy fountain, to the massive garage, to the guardhouse. “Huh. How’d you say your family made money again?”

“Business.”

“What sort of business would that be then?”

“Okay.” Takis clapped his hands. “Time to go, fat man.”

Lopez got all huffy. “Who you calling fat?”

Takis looked like he was done negotiating. “You can walk or I will make you walk.”

Lopez took a step back. “Touch me and you’re gonna be sorry! I’m carrying.”

I rolled my eyes. “Yeah, your phone. It’s not exactly a lethal weapon.”

“You don’t know that,” he said. “Could be it doubles as a stun gun. There’s an app for everything. I could fry you where you stand.”

“You’d have to come through them first.” I waved a hand at Takis, Xander, Marika, and the dozen or so other Family members who had wandered over to see if there really was a stun gun app for an Android phone.

“Your family sucks!” Lopez said. “I hate Greece. I’m not going anywhere with any of you crazy people.” He lurched at me with his

phone. I snatched it out of his hand.

“Your app doesn’t work,” I said.

He snatched the phone back. “I knew I should’ve bought the full version. But ninety-nine cents is ninety-nine cents. They don’t pay us enough for that shit.”

Takis grabbed at him. Lopez clobbered him with his phone. “Don’t touch me, you Greece-ball.” He turned to bolt.

I stuck out my foot, and the cop tripped. The phone shot out of his hand, hit the flagstones, shattering into its original, separate parts. “My phone,” he mewled. He scrambled to pick up the pieces, and then flung them in my face.

“Dude, you’re making it worse,” I said, dodging.

“How can it be worse? It’s ruined. And I didn’t pay for insurance because I’m a cheap fuck.”

“Insurance is a racket,” Takis agreed.

“This is all your fault,” Lopez growled, surging at me. He knocked me down like a skittle, crushed me on the stones. With him being close to double my weight, I wasn’t going anywhere. Xander and Takis leaped forward and began trying to yank him off me. Marika shot out a string of curse words; very colorful but ultimately not helpful. I managed to pull my arm free and jammed a finger into Lopez’s eye.

“My fucking eye! You bitch!” He squealed and fell sideways.

Partially free now, I scrambled out the rest of the way and yanked his hair good and hard. He cried out as I pulled on those fine hairs on his nape. Tears squirted out of his eyes.

Takis winced. “Remind me never to fight with you. You fight dirty, like a girl.”

“I am a girl!”

Lopez hauled himself to his knees with Xander on his back. Xander was built like a warship, but the vice cop was a fat, sweaty kraken. He launched himself at my ankles. For a moment I thought I’d make it. I wobbled this way and that, and then gravity reached out and pulled me closer for a hot stone kiss.

Oof!

I lay there, sprawling on the flagstones, feeling around for a weapon, trying to catch my breath.

“Ha-ha!” Lopez said. “I win.”

“You’re a dick,” I panted.

He raised his head. “Don’t care, as long as I won.”

Xander airlifted him off the ground, with the help of Takis and some of the other cousins.

“Yeah, looks like you won for sure,” I said.

Lopez’s eye was watering where I’d poked it. His Hawaiian shirt had popped a button, revealing an ocean of sweaty skin with a riptide

of dark hairs. He stabbed the air with his pointed finger. "It's on like Donkey Kong."

"It's going down like Chinatown," I lobbed back.

Marika and one of the cousins helped me up off the ground. My back hurt and my hip needed replacing. Maybe they'd give me something bionic.

"You're a psycho," Lopez said. "That's what you are. Crazy bitch."

"I'm crazy? You threw yourself at me!"

"All women are crazy," Takis said in English.

"Say it a little louder," I told him. "I don't think your wife heard you."

He shot her a nervous sideways glance, but Marika was oblivious. "That one is the queen of crazy," he muttered.

Now that Lopez was off the ground and back in the upright position (his tray wasn't going anywhere without diet and exercise) Xander and company steered him through the arch. I limped along behind them. If they were going to lock him up, I wanted to watch. Marika fell into step beside me.

I glanced sideways at her. "Where were your guns?"

"I did not want Takis to know I have them."

"Marika ... where did you get them?"

"Maybe from the armory."

"You've been in the armory?"

"Only one."

"There's more than one?"

"I know two. Wait." She looked at me. "How many do you know about?"

"One."

"I should not have said anything."

"Don't worry, I won't tell." I chewed on that a moment. The armory I'd seen was a small, dusty root cellar of a place. Unimpressive. Nothing like the movies. I'd expected superhero-level stuff, with bright lights, white walls, and cool gadgets handed out by a Greek Morgan Freeman. "So ... now that I know, where is it?"

"Which one do you know about?"

I told her about the room beneath the conservatory, and she grinned. "That old place with the crates? You know what is in those crates?"

"Warheads, missiles, weapons of mass destruction?"

She laughed at my naïveté, but kindly, the way you laugh at old people, small children, and foreigners. "Bulbs. Baboulas stores them in the crates until she is ready to plant them."

"And the guns I saw there?"

"Old. All the shiny, new things are in the main armory."

“Which is ... where?”

“The farm.”

I hadn't seen the farm yet. I knew the meat and vegetables originated on the family farm, but it's hard to get excited about farm animals once you're over the age of twelve. Especially farm animals you know you might eventually meet again on the plate. I couldn't eat anything I'd fed or cuddled.

I rubbed my hands together. “So when are we going?”

Sharp intake of breath. “We are not going there.”

“You went.”

We were almost at the cupboard that lead to the dungeon. “I have to go,” Marika said. “The laundry will not do itself. Text me if you go out again.”

She flipped the domestic switch and hurried off to do grown-up stuff, while I stepped into the closet behind the menfolk and their captive. Yeah, Lopez was a dick but I didn't approve of them stuffing him in a cell—even one of Grandma's cushy accommodations.

“You can't do this,” Lopez said. “I'm an American citizen and a cop. You can't lock me up. Fuck. Twice in one day?”

“Don't worry,” I told him. “You're a pain in the ass but I'm going to sort this out.”

“What are you gonna do—ask the Godfather for a favor? Somebody getting hitched today?”

“Godmother.”

He chewed on that as we rode the escalator down. “That old lady, your grandmother is Greece's Don Corleone? But she's a woman!”

Takis grinned. It wasn't a nice grin. “You should see what Baboulas can do with a melon baller.”

Lopez gulped. The color drained out of his skin as Takis and Xander marched him past the old cells. “Jesus Christ,” he muttered. “What are you people?”

“The real dungeon is pretty nice,” I told him.

He whimpered.

Xander unlocked the inner door.

“Hey, Katerina, is that you?” The voice belonged to the dungeon's permanent resident.

“It's me.”

“You got that *loukoumi*, yet?”

“No, uh ...” Crap. “I'm working on it.”

There was a pause. “Well, okay. But I sure would appreciate it.”

Xander and Takis escorted the cop to his new—hopefully temporary—living quarters.

“I gotta get out of here,” Lopez said. “I wanna go home. Greece sucks. Everything's old and you people are crazy.”

Grandma was in her yard watching the jungle of potted plants grow. None of the other gardens were temporary, moveable green LEGO blocks. When I asked Grandma about it, she laughed.

“It was that old *skeela*’s idea, your great-great-grandmother. She hated gardening, so she had them pour all this concrete. It is a condition of living here that the concrete cannot be dug up. Remember that when all this is yours.”

“You didn’t like her?” Grandma had just called the woman a bitch.

She wagged a finger. “I did not say that. I learned many things from that woman, including that *baklava* recipe you like so much.”

“It is good *baklava*,” I admitted.

She settled back in her chair. Her mind wandered off for a moment. When it came back it was story time. “That woman ... always she called me by a different name, never my own. On the outside she did not approve of my marriage to her grandson, your grandfather.”

“Why not?”

“The only marriage that would have appeased her was a marriage to royalty or family.” She made a face, hopefully at the idea of incest. “I was neither. One day she slipped though and called me Katerina. It was when she was teaching me to throw grenades, blindfolded, with one arm tied behind my back.”

I blinked. This wasn’t normal. None of this was normal. My family was crazy-cakes with a side of nuts.

“Was she running some sort of training camp?”

Grandma laughed. “In this family it pays to have a variety of skills. Even she knew your grandfather was not a leader, so she raised me to be one. Without her, I would have been just another Greek housewife.”

I snorted at the idea. “You?”

“I was nobody once, Katerina. We all start out that way, even kings. Eh, in my old age I find old memories floating to surface again. Some of them I am not even sure are mine.”

While I was working my way up to asking her why Lopez was currently in the dungeon, my brain was doing some light chores in the background, forging connections that should have been made hours ago; my neurons had become sloppy and slow under the oppressive regime that is a Greek August. I had to speak to Lopez—now.

Mentally, I slapped my forehead. “I have to go, but I’ll be right back. I really want to hear more about my great-great-grandmother.”

“Go, go. I will be here. What else do I have to do? Wait—there is something inside for you. On the kitchen table.”

I stuck my head in the kitchen. Sure enough, there was a flat box on the table. I grabbed the package, took it back outside.

“You didn’t have to get me anything.”

“Who said it was from me?”

All incoming packages were checked for explosives, so I knew it wouldn’t blow up in my face. I popped the box open. Nestled inside was a woolen sweater with a sheep decal on the front. It was big, it was chunky, it was hideous. It was amazing. This sweater, I decided, would become my Netflix-and-chill sweater.

Grandma craned her neck to get a look at the sweater. “It is from those two sheep fuckers you helped the other week.”

“Technically only one of them was a sheep fucker. The other one was a sheep lover. And I’m not sure I helped them. It went bad fast when I mentioned souvlaki.”

“And you think you do not belong here. Even I did not know there was a difference.”

“Oh sure, there’s a difference. One of them is gross and weird, and the other one is just weird.”

I carried the sweater into my room, then off I trotted, back down to the dungeon. This time there was a little boy down there, sitting cross-legged outside Homeless Guy’s room. In front of him a small chessboard was set up. A game was in progress.

The boy looked up. “*Thea Katerina!*” he squealed. Aunt Katerina—wasn’t that sweet? Technically I wasn’t his aunt, but it was that whole Greek respect thing. I was older and I was family, therefore ... aunt. Tomas was the youngest of four zoo animals, belonging to one of my cousins and his wife Litsa. Litsa dressed like a reject from *The Real Housewives of New Jersey*. Her implants were dollar-store deals, stuffed into her chest by Captain Obvious. Her parenting style was less tiger, more rabbit; she ran past occasionally to fling food at her offspring, then she was gone again.

“Who’s winning?” I asked him.

His face settled back into its serious mask. “Nobody yet. But I think this time I will win.”

I believed him. Tomas was only halfway to ten but he had the mind of an adult safecracker. Apparently he could open anything, solve any puzzle, and clean his plate. The dungeon breaking wasn’t new to Tomas—he came down here all the time. Now I knew why.

“We will see,” Homeless Guy said cryptically.

I made my way to Lopez’s cell and knocked.

“He’s not there,” Tomas said absently, his attention on the game.

“Did someone move him?” That was fast.

“No. He walked out that way.” He hooked his miniature thumb at the main door—the only door in or out of this place. “He was

sneaking.”

“You mean he was ... escaping?”

“I asked him if he was playing Edmond Dantés, but he didn’t answer.”

“He’s American,” I said, “so he wouldn’t have understood you.”

“I know. I asked him in English.”

“You speak English?”

“I learned it last week.”

My mind boggled. “... All of it?”

He shrugged. “All the words in the 1971 edition of The Oxford English Dictionary, because that’s the only one I could find.”

“And ... Lopez still didn’t answer you?”

“No,” he said in English.

“God, I hate that guy,” I muttered. “How did he get out, any idea?”

“Instruction video on YouTube,” Tomas said. “Everything is on YouTube.”

Yes—yes it was. “Oh boy, Grandma is going to freak. I can’t even imagine where he’s gone.”

Tomas moved his bishop across the board, swiping one of his opponent’s pieces. “I know that, too. Want me to tell you?”

“How about you just assume I want to know everything.”

He nodded. “He was talking to someone on the phone, and that person told him he had to find a way out. The American wasn’t happy.”

“Was he angry?”

Tomas tilted his chin up. *Tst*. “He had the same look my brother gets when Mama makes us eat okra. He thinks it looks like dead sea monsters and they’re going to come back to life and attack his face.”

“They do look like dead sea monsters.” They tasted like it, too. So Lopez looked scared. That was interesting ... and perplexing. “Was he speaking English?”

Tomas nodded. “He said something else—I don’t think I can say it.”

“Why not?”

“It was a bad word. I’m not allowed to say bad words.”

“A bad Greek word or a bad English word?”

“English.”

I chewed on my lip a moment, mulling it over.

Homeless Guy came to the rescue. “It doesn’t count if it’s a foreign word. Do your parents even speak English, beyond the basics? I bet they don’t. They probably wouldn’t even know it’s a bad word.”

Tomas nodded, but I could tell the little guy was worried.

I had a plan. “I’m going to say a bunch of words, and you nod if I say it, okay?”

He nodded.

I started with the big gun, the F-word. He didn't nod. Then I moved down to the list. Technically, the C-word was the biggest gun, but there was no way I was uttering that syllable within hearing shot of a child, unless someone's life was in imminent danger.

"Shit?"

He wagged his head. Not exactly a confirmation. Not a denial, either.

"Like that, but ..."

Think, Kat. Think.

Porta potties. Dad's workplace that wasn't his workplace. The dope who had fed me a line of bullshit that I gobbled right up because I was a rung dopier than the ham-head dope.

"Shitz," I said. "Did he call the other person Shitz?"

Nod.

I went hot, cold, and annoyed all over. "Oh boy," I said, slapping my forehead. What did Lopez have to do with the owner of Shitz-U? I was missing pieces along with my marbles. And how was Dad tied to all this. I knew he was—I just couldn't see the strings tying this all together.

"The American told the man with the bad word name he was going to Sesklo."

"Sesklo," I said. "What's Sesklo?"

"I know this one," Homeless Guy chimed in. "It is one of two Neolithic settlements outside of Volos. There is nothing there of interest unless you like old things and have a good imagination. Me, I go there I see stacks of rocks lined up in neat lines, and I think, So what? My dog—if I had a dog—could do this, line up these rocks and pile them on top of one another. Someone with an imagination goes there and they see people and houses and life. Eh, it is just dead things. And rocks. Mostly rocks."

I leaned against his door. "How can a voracious reader have no imagination?"

"That is a mystery to me, too. But I am a man with no imagination, no vision, and no ambition beyond acquiring some of that rose *loukoumi*."

"Check," Tomas said.

The door flap opened. The man inside peered out and down at the chessboard. "You little bastard, you are getting good."

"I know," Tomas said.

I left them to it.

Grandma was still in the yard when I slouched back, steaming. In my absence, Papou had rolled in, eagle perched on his shoulder. All he needed was an eye patch and a peg leg and he'd look like an overbrined pirate.

"Did you hear we've got a runaway?" he said. "That American *malakas* walked right out of here."

"Yeah, I just heard," I said.

Grandma rolled her eyes at the heavens. "He did not walk, he sneaked."

Papou shrugged. "Walked ... sneaked ... what's the difference?"

"A man who walks goes out the front gate," Grandma said. "This one crouched down and stayed in the shadows, then he climbed the wall."

It wasn't that hard to climb. Although with that gut of his any climbing he did was bordering on miraculous.

"I told your grandmother to shoot him, but she refused." He looked at Grandma. "I remember when you used to be fun."

"Run," she said, "and I will have someone shoot you. Then I will have my fun."

He looked hopeful. "Really?"

"No."

"Just as well. I have Yiorgos to look after now."

"Back up," I said. "You know Lopez escaped?"

"We watched him," Papou said.

"Downstairs," Grandma said.

Of course. Directly below us was the compound's control room. It was the eyes and ears of this place ... and several other places, including more than one police building that I knew of. I'd never told Melas his place of employment was bugged. I didn't think he'd take it well.

"And you didn't stop him?"

"What for?" Grandma asked. "I wanted him to go."

"Why?"

"Because the good little donkey was following a carrot. And where there is a carrot there is somebody waving the carrot. Policemen do not usually follow a woman across the world when all they want to do is ask her questions."

"I knew that," I said, then had a change of heart. "No, I didn't. So why did they follow me?"

"The question is: Why did they come here?"

"And the answer is ...?"

Grandma shrugged. "I do not have the answers, only the questions."

I chewed on the inside of my cheek a moment, processing. "He's

going to Sesklo. Meeting someone, I think. Which means I'm following the little worm there."

"Little. Ha!" Papou slapped his leg. "That belly of his could eclipse the sun. They could roll him in front of a cave and keep Christ inside. Even the son of God could not move that one."

"You are not going anywhere," Grandma said. "Too dangerous."

Papou broke off a piece of baklava, offered it to his bird. The eagle turned his beak up at it. "Let her go."

"It's not like you can stop me," I said. Then I remembered who I was talking to. This was Baboulas. She had an army, a dungeon, lots of guns. She had a killer baklava recipe that she could use against me. One foot out of line ... no more baklava for Katerina. It would be a low blow only my hips would thank her for. "Well ... you could, but Lopez is my problem to solve."

Grandma rose from her seat. She tottered to her front door. At the last moment, she looked back at me. "Xander and Takis are on their way out front now. If you run you can catch them." Her attention shifted to Papou. "You want coffee, you old *malakas*?"

I bolted.

"Crap!"

There was nothing left of Grandma's henchmen except a settling sepia cloud. I jogged over to the garage, where a couple of the young cousins were slopping soap bubbles over the limo's elongated hood.

"I need a car," I said. "Can I have one that's not mine, please? It's too yellow."

"The last one was stolen," one of the cousins said nervously.

"You'll get it back." I crossed my fingers. "And it wasn't stolen. More like ... temporarily requisitioned by law enforcement."

He glanced at his compadre, who nodded. "We have to get permission first."

"Okay. But can you hurry?"

I jiggled to subconsciously hurry him up, kind of like running water when you want to invoke someone's need to pee. After civilizations rose and fell, he backed a black Fiat out of the garage and slapped the keys into my hand.

"Stay away from cops this time."

I thanked him and asked which cousin he was. A river of relatives ran through this place, and it was almost impossible to separate them into orderly piles. It didn't help that almost everyone had the same nose.

"Stavros." He nodded to his companion. "Stavros." At the guard

booth: “Stavros.”

“Can I just give you guys numbers?”

He threw back his head, laughed, and then stopped abruptly. “No.”

“Worth a shot.” I jangled the keys. “Thanks.”

I didn’t have clue one where I was going, but the dash had GPS. I punched in Sesklo and followed the instructions down the long driveway. No talking map for me—that thing was obnoxious, passive-aggressive, and bitchy. At the end of the driveway, Elias was waiting, chewing on a stalk of something green. I stopped alongside him. He looked like a stick of licorice in his Stavros-approved black.

“Need company?”

“Do I have a choice?”

He grinned. “Not really.”

“Better get in then.”

He angled into the Fiat’s tight passenger seat and buckled up. “Sesklo?”

I glanced sideways at him. “Do you know everything that goes on around here?”

“Mostly it’s a need-to-know thing. If you’re going somewhere, I need to know about it. So someone makes sure I know.”

Sesklo was located south of Volos and west. The landscape was a brown bag with the occasional green crayon squiggle. The trees were mostly olives. Olives are like that one old man who refuses to shift when the city plans a bypass through his property. An olive tree digs its roots in, and unless you’re an earthquake, it’s not going anywhere. August was tough, but it was no earthquake.

We parked at the bottom of the hill behind a clump of olive trees. They had their backs to us, branches bending toward the hill, gossiping about how the view wasn’t what it used to be. It wouldn’t surprise me if they began clawing at the ground, running that pesky hill out of town, so they could get a better look. A smattering of other vehicles and a couple of tour buses blotted the area. Sesklo, the Internet told me, was a tourist attraction for people who liked to *ooh* and *ahh* over rock foundations and nice views. Americans loved it; but then ours was a civilization with a brief, bloody backstory and no old relics other than the Confederate flag. We had fossils, but mostly they were in politics. Europe was full of old stuff.

No sign of Takis and Xander. No sign of Lopez, either. Had he hitched a ride to Sesklo or commandeered a vehicle? He’d left the moped at the compound. Even he wasn’t ballsy enough to storm the gate with his wannabe motorcycle.

Elias jumped out. He wandered over to the sign at the bottom of the hill.

He came back looking puzzled. “I thought we were going to

Sesklo.”

“This isn’t Sesklo?”

“Map says it’s Dimini.”

I rushed over to check. Sure enough, we standing at the bottom of the ruins in Dimini. According to the map there was supposed to be someone here dishing out electronic maps, but it was crawling toward dark and no one was manning the booth. Sightseeing isn’t nearly as popular when there’s no sight to see.

“I hate you,” I told the GPS. “You suck.” Then I apologized. GPS was one short evolutionary step away from a terminator. Last thing I wanted was GPS lady telling me she’d be back, then hunting me relentlessly with a rocket launcher. There was enough of that in my family already.

We jumped back in the car and zipped up the street—more or less—to Sesklo.

“I don’t get it,” I said when we stopped. “They look pretty much the same.”

Elias scrolled down his phone. “The other one had the Mycenaean and Neolithic settlement. This one just has the Neolithic settlement.”

“So ...” I squinted at the landscape. “... If you were a turncoat American cop, where would you be?”

“On a beach in Hawaii, drinking fruity drinks with the little umbrellas.”

“You have beaches here, and the fruity drinks.”

“Yes, but it’s not the same. Hawaii is exotic. Greece is ... eh ... it’s Greece.”

He was jaded. I got it—I was getting jaded, too. Greece was pretty on the surface, but her underbelly was snails, puppy dog tails, donkey manure, and razor wire.

“Come on,” I said. “Let’s climb this thing. If I was meeting someone here I wouldn’t bother hanging around in this ... can we call it a car park?”

He took stock of the area. “Field.”

Sesklo was the same deal as Dimini, except here there were no cars in sight other than the Fiat. I scooted it up under some olive trees and hoped the oncoming night would do the rest of the work for me. The trail was Greece’s usual blend of dirt and rocks, winding around the hill. I stooped down to pick up a few pebbles and stuffed them in my pocket. We passed low arrangements of stones set in basic geometric shapes, remnants of a civilization that fled when Greece’s temperatures soared. Granted, their village was on fire at the time. Back in those days they couldn’t blame the fire on Vulcan. He and the rest of the Greek gods weren’t a thing a yet. For five centuries post-burning, the area had been uninhabited, until some Late Neolithic

people settled on the mound. Unfortunately for them, history didn't consider their civilization nearly as interesting as their predecessors. They were barely a footnote.

Elias tapped my elbow, nodded up ahead. I followed his gesture further up the hill, not far from what was supposed to be Sesklo's *megaron*, which was just a cool Greek word that meant 'great hall'. Lopez was framed in shadows. He was stabbing at the ground with a spade, muttering.

"Couldn't have just handed it to me like a man. Had to get all fancy, make me work for it when I already worked my tail off for it." The spade clanged against metal. "Ha! Gotcha!" He crouched in the dirt, tugged on something buried in the ground. Given that this was a historical site of some cultural significance, and given Greece's paranoia about foreigners making off with their antiquities, Lopez was skating on highly illegal ground.

There was no sign of Xander and Takis. If they were here they were lying low, swathed in shadows and dirt. Earlier I'd tucked the only weapon Grandma allowed me, my father's childhood slingshot, into my back pocket. I loaded up one of the stones I'd pocketed a few moments ago, and pulled back on the elastic until it was taut and eager to take a bite out of the cop's backside. I had my vindictive moments, but it wasn't that time of the month, I'd ingested plenty of coffee this morning, and my blood sugar was just fine, so I aimed for his leg.

Lopez shrieked as the stone connected with his calf. "Fuck!" Then in a quieter voice: "Fuckity, fuck, fuck." He grabbed the spade, and whatever he'd pulled out of Greece's zit, and backed up into a shadow.

"Who's there?" he called out.

"You left without saying goodbye."

"Katerina, that you?"

"What are you doing, Lopez?"

He laughed, a belly-shaker with a thin web of nerves. "You alone out there?"

"I haven't been alone since I arrived in Greece. It's kind of driving me crazy."

"I know the feeling. I just want to get what I came for and go. How's that sound to you?"

"What about Bishop?"

"What about him? Not my problem."

"He's your partner."

"Yeah, let me tell you about my partner. Eugene Bishop is a dickwad. Did you see those pants he wears, the attitude? Asshole doesn't know if he's black or white."

"I figured that was part of the job, like a Halloween costume he

forgot to take off.”

“Ha-ha. Naw, Bishop went in too deep. When he came back out he was all fucked up. Went in a white boy, came out just as white, only he don’t know it.”

“Still no reason to not give a damn that he’s missing.”

“He’s not missing, he’s just in escrow with the others. That fucking dumb kid and that fat drug dealer you’re friends with.”

“Escrow?”

“It’s like when you buy a house—”

“I know what it means,” I said. “They’re kidnapped. What for?”

He was still in the shadow, but there was enough light for me to see the edge of him shrug. “I don’t know. Not my business. I did my piece and now I’m out of here.”

“What piece was that?”

“Keep an eye on you. Figure out what you do and don’t know about your old man. Get the hell out of Dodge. That’s the part I’m working on now. It’d be in your best interests just to let that part happen, natural-like.”

I thought about it a moment. My question-answer sheet was seriously unbalanced. “Can you do the whole villain reveal thing? You’d really be helping me out.”

“I ain’t the bad guy here. I’m like ... think of me as a screwdriver or a wrench. I came in, got a job done, and now I’m going back in the toolbox.”

“You are kind of a tool,” I said.

He laughed. “Sticks and stones. How’d you know I was playing for the other team?”

“Penka. You let her nationality slip. Only way you could have known is if you’d met her.”

“Shit,” he said. “This is why I suck at undercover work. I gotta work on that.”

I saw his shadow move, heard the pop of a metal lock opening. “Who’s in the motherfuckin’ money?” The man was so happy his voice was wearing a big, shit-eating grin. “That’s right—me, Oscar Lopez. See ya, suckers.”

Money. His payment for a job done; Lopez didn’t seem like a guy who did jobs well.

“Thought you were meeting someone here,” I called out.

“So did I. Last minute change of plans, I guess. What do I care? The money is where it’s supposed to be.”

A thought came to me. “US dollars?”

“Euros. Spends the same as American money, and it’s worth more.”

“You sure about that?”

“About which part?”

“The part about it being money.”

He held up one of the bundles, gave it a little shake, sniffed. “If it looks like money and smells like money, it’s money.”

“New money?”

“Yeah, looks new to me. Must’ve got it straight from the printer.” He chuckled. That wouldn’t last.

“Monopoly money.”

He grin in his voice dried up. He stepped into the dwindling light. “What do you mean?”

“Do you recognize a fake greenback when you see one?”

“Sure. These days nobody’s making a good-enough copy of the US dollar.”

“And the euro?”

He shot a nervous glance at the bundle in his hand. “Looks real enough to me. Feels like freedom.”

“How would you know?”

His mouth hung open stupidly. I really wanted to shove a handful of walnuts in, see if he could make them crack. “Uh ...” He looked at the money, looked at the gun that had appeared in his other hand.

Then he chose one.

BANG!

I dropped to the ground and rolled. The first bit was voluntary; the rolling happened because of a conspiracy between the incline and my sudden lack of coordination.

Where the hell were Xander and Takis? Would they take my body home to Grandma when I hit the bottom or just throw me under a slab of stone or whatever the Neolithic people used to bury their dead? Rocks bit me. Sticks snapped under my weight, making me regret my newly discovered baklava addiction. On the bright side, maybe the extra flab would cushion my fall and my corpse wouldn't need too much patching up once the mortician got ahold of me.

Then I stopped. Or rather, something stopped me.

I looked up into Melas's grinning face.

"I like this thing when you fall at my feet," he said. "We should do that more often, without the shooting." I oinked and he laughed. "You okay?" His strong hands pulled me up off the ground.

"Elias," I said.

A couple more shots fired, then a third.

"Relax," he said. "Elias can take care of himself. He's not alone up there anyway."

There was more gunfire, then the clatter of metal hitting rocks.

"He's down," Elias called out.

Now that I knew my bodyguard was safe, I wheeled on Melas. "What the hell is going on?"

He opened his mouth, closed it again, obviously not going to speak. After I'd helped him out he wouldn't tell me what was going on, and it wasn't right.

"You owe me," I said. "I'm up to my neck in this, helping you. The least you can do is share."

"You should go home, find a nice man, make some babies."

"Or ... I could tell your mother you won't help Katerina Makri's granddaughter."

"Oooh, playing dirty." He hooked his hand around the back of my neck, dragged me closer. "What are you prepared to give me if I tell you what I know?"

"Some good advice."

He laughed. "Advice, huh? Honey, I know more about the world than you do."

"Probably you do. But I know something you don't."

"What?"

I shrugged. "You first."

He sighed, pushed a hand through his hair. It seemed like I was starting to become his number one source of frustration. "I'm not sure I know. I've been watching the compound—"

"Watching me."

"—Watching you," he agreed. "Watching the big guy, ever since you said his partner went missing. You know where they've been staying?"

"A Holiday Inn?" He looked at me blankly. Guess they didn't have Holiday Inns here. "Okay, tell me."

He shook his head. "You're something else. Lopez and his missing buddy have been crashing at the same hotel as the Germans."

"Wow, that's a coincidence," I said dryly.

"Yeah, I didn't think so either. So I did some checking and it's owned by a German company."

"Is it Shitz?"

He stared at me for a moment. "I can't tell if you're asking for the bathroom or swearing."

I didn't fill him in—not all the way, anyway. Not now. Maybe I would, if necessary, but over food and coffee, not dirt and stones.

"It's a name," I said. "One of the family kids overheard him speaking to someone named Shitz."

"Not Shitz. The owner is a company called Winkler Enterprises. That mean anything to you?"

"Hm ..." Yes ... yes ... YES. "Not really. Unless you're talking about the Fonz."

"Why did you twitch?"

"I didn't twitch."

"Yeah, you did."

"Bug."

His eyes narrowed for a moment. He leaned back against a tree trunk and folded his arms. "You already know the Germans set up camp in Agria so they could shift their freshly made money and drugs. Greece, they figure, is the perfect patsy for what they're doing. Hard financial times, desperate people, a lot of traffic using Greece as a gateway to the rest of Europe. This Winkler character is a phantom. He doesn't exist, as far as I can tell. But he's got his fingerprints all over a bunch of businesses and properties all over the world."

"Maybe it's a fake name."

"No 'maybe' about it. There are real Winklers out there, but none of them are our guy—so far, anyway. There's a limit to how deep I can dig without alerting the wrong people."

“So are Lopez and Bishop real cops?”

“Yeah. One of the first things I checked. They’re real enough.”

I told him what Lopez had told me, that Bishop and the others were human escrow.

His forehead crumpled up. “So somebody—maybe this Winkler—wants something. And he’s holding them until he gets it.”

“Like what?”

“You tell me. You’re what these missing people have in common.”

I shook my head. “I’m not the only one. Penka and Donk have ties to Baby Dimitri.”

“And the missing cop?”

So much for my theory. “I haven’t figured that out yet.”

“I think you’re the common thread. Which means it won’t be long before this Winkler character steps out of the shadows and reveals his or herself.”

“Was Lopez trying to infiltrate the compound? He told me it was his job to tail me and squeeze me for information about Dad.”

He laughed. “Is that what he said? Honey, the compound is already infiltrated. Baboulas knows some of the leaks flow both ways. And if I know Baboulas she’s already figured out who the bad guys are and is slowly feeding them rope.”

“Rope?”

“So they can hang themselves, when the time comes.”

Cheery. “So what was he doing?”

“Maybe he really wanted to know about your father, but that seems thin. I guess we’ll find out.” He pushed away from the tree, hollered, “He still alive?”

Takis’ voice floated back. “For now.”

Black wasn’t universally flattering. Xander resembled a chunk of obsidian in his painted-on T-shirt, cargo pants, and boots. Takis looked like something that escaped a Crayola box. Together they loaded Lopez into the back of the SUV. The cop wrapped his arms around his metal box of treasure like it was his long-lost teddy, bottom lip jutting out far enough that he could balance a taquito on it if he held still long enough.

“You,” he mouthed through the glass. I raised my middle finger, scratched the tip of my nose.

Melas and Takis spent several minutes arguing over who had jurisdiction, until Takis threatened to put snakes in Melas’s bed. Melas threw him a double *moutsas* and said, “Take the *malakas*. But I want to talk to him.”

“Before we kill him or after?” Takis wanted to know. “Heh. Just a little joke.”

Melas stomped back to the Toyota he’d requisitioned, and we were off.

Our caravan hadn’t gone far when a white van rolled into place across the trail. Melas stopped first, followed by the SUV, and finally Elias and me in the Fiat. Melas got out; he left his lights on, shining a spotlight on the van’s flank. Seeing as how no one shot him full of holes, the rest of us got out, too, except Takis, who stayed in the SUV with Lopez.

The van’s door slid open and a goddess stepped out of a metal oyster shell. Hera. She was wearing black skinny pants and a black T-shirt that made bigger mountains out of mountains. Why couldn’t she spontaneously combust?

Hera’s eyes gobbled up Melas when she spotted him. Her mouth curved up in a satisfied smile. “Well, somebody made a quick recovery. I understand you’ve got something for us.”

“You understand wrong,” Melas said.

“Sorry, lover,” she said. Men in suits exited the van. No sign of guns, but I knew they were there. “This one is ours.”

“Actually, he’s ours,” I said.

Her smile widened. “National intelligence trumps petty hoods, sweetness.”

“Hey, I’m not a hood, I’m a bill collector.”

She laughed. “A bill collector. Perfect. I bet you’re really going places. Now get out of my way.”

Hera and her army of men in black crunched over to the SUV and helped themselves to the American cop.

“Hey, you fuckers, who are you?” Lopez bucked and kicked, but four is greater than one, even when that one is built like a walrus. They stowed him in the back of the van, then Hera climbed back in.

“I hate her,” I said.

She glanced over her shoulder, clearly unoffended. “I heard that.”

“Good,” I said. “You were supposed to.”

“I don’t hate you,” she said. “You don’t exist to me.”

The men were standing there watching us, brows raised.

“Good luck with that one,” I told her, “if it’s intelligence you’re looking for. He’s dumber than a stump.”

She smiled. “The dumber they are, the more they talk. You should come in sometime. I bet you could tell us a lot.”

It took me a moment. “Hey ...”

She shifted that smile to Melas, where it turned real. “See you soon,” she said. “They’ve transferred me to Volos. Now we’ll have time to kiss and make up.”

He stood there, mouth a tight, white seam, fists balled at his sides. Was he happy he was getting a second shot at a goddess? I couldn't tell. He wasn't happy she was making off with our prisoner, I knew that much.

She slammed the door shut and the van rumbled away. Melas jumped back in the car and punched the gas.

We did the same thing, only I did it slower on account of how the road was bumpy and rocky and I didn't want to crack the windshield.

None of us were happy. I expressed it through the medium of blistering rock music, funneled through a rusted tin can. Radio stations around here were mostly amateur and often only played one album on replay. The quality wasn't great, but then neither was my mood. We drove back to the family compound.

I wondered about Xander. If he was real NIS either Hera didn't know or she was an accomplished actress. That didn't seem likely. She was as subtle as menstrual blood on white shorts. Maybe his fake NIS ID was the real fake deal.

By the time Elias and I pulled up, Melas was already outside the gates, pacing.

"I thought you were undercover," I called out the window.

"Not anymore," he said.

"Did you find the third German?"

Chin up, down. "Not yet. But I will."

"Don't forget to tell your girlfriend so she can grab him, too."

"Wait—you think I told her we had Lopez?"

"I think her timing was suspicious and convenient."

He popped the car door open, hauled me out. "Park the car," he told Elias. "Katerina is coming with me for a moment." Elias looked at me. I shrugged, and then nodded. Xander wandered over. He nodded to Elias, who took that as a sign that I'd be safe with Melas. Obviously my word wasn't enough. My bodyguard scrambled across the seat and parked the Fiat outside the garage. When he was done he jogged back to the guardhouse, where he could keep his eyes on me.

I assumed the defensive, pissed-off harpy position: legs slightly apart, hands on my hips. "Bring on your excuses, lame explanations, and your wild guesses."

"I don't know how Hera knew we'd be there, or that we'd bagged Lopez. I haven't spoken to her. We don't talk. There's no reason to."

"Uh-huh."

"Do you talk to exes, call them up to see how they're doing?"

I didn't—ever. Once a relationship was over I moved them into one of two piles: *You Die—You Die and You Go to Hell*, or *Meh*. There wasn't a pile of old dates and boyfriends I checked up on, unless stalking them on social media counted. And everyone did that, so in

my estimation it didn't count.

"No."

"Well neither do I. You missed the part last night where I told you Hera wasn't special to me. Maybe there was potential at one point, but it never happened. Never would have happened either, no matter how much more time we had."

"Looks like you better tell her that, and soon."

"Whatever she's got planned, it's all in her head. There is no me and Hera."

I relaxed. Why did I care anyway? Melas wasn't mine and never would or could be. "So what do you think she's up to? With the German thing, I mean."

"With the NIS you never know. They do what they do, and they do it in secret. Our paths don't cross, unless they need something from us."

"And if you need something from them?"

He started to laugh. "Good luck. They're like dragons. They hoard information like it's gold. Whatever Hera is up to, you'll never get it out of her, and you'll probably never see Lopez again. He'll just ... vanish."

"If you had to guess, what would you say is going on?"

"I'd say he knows more than he admitted about a certain German operation—or they suspect he knows more."

"Damn it," I said. "He's gone, and now we've still got three missing people—one of them his partner."

I did a half turn toward the gates. Elias was chatting to the guard but his attention was still aimed in my direction. As far as bodyguards went, he was shaping up to be a diligent one. Marika ... not so much. She was a better sidekick, even if it wasn't a paying position. Maybe I could have a word with Grandma about the situation.

"I've got to go," I said. "I need sugar, preferably in the form of baklava. But I'd settle for directly out of the bag with a spoon if there's no baklava."

"You never said what you were doing in Sesklo."

"Looking for Lopez. We knew he was meeting someone there."

"Someone who never showed up," Melas said.

"Lopez said the plans changed. He was happy to collect the money and go."

"Smooth move telling him it was counterfeit." He sounded mildly dazed. "I can't believe Baboulas let you go." He looked at me. "She did let you go, right?"

"I didn't give her a choice. One minute she wants me involved, the next minute she wants me to stand back. Some consistency would be nice."

"I wish she'd lock you in your room until this is over."

"Or the dungeon?"

His eyes darkened. "Or the dungeon." He let out a shaky sigh. "Lopez could have shot you."

"Good thing my reflexes are lightning."

"What happens when the next Lopez comes along and he's faster than you?"

"My plan is to be immortal and live forever," I said, borrowing Grandma's plan.

"You're giving me an ulcer."

"Probably that's your mother's cooking."

His grin came on slowly, steadily, like a submarine surfacing. "You're still bitter I ate her *moussaka* in front of you."

"No. Not me. Uh-uh."

"Yes—" he moved closer "—you are."

Elias jogged over. "Sorry," he said to the detective, hangdog look on his face. "Baboulas said to let you know she'd cut off your arm if you touch Katerina. But to be fair, she said she would let you choose which arm to keep."

Melas grinned. "And they say Baboulas isn't reasonable."

"From what I hear that's a good offer," Elias said. "She must like you."

Aunt Rita was going as I was coming.

"Takis already briefed Mama," she said. "She is not happy."

"I don't blame her. We'll never get Lopez back, according to Melas."

"Not that—she knows how the NIS is. The fat policeman shot at you. She's angry because no one put a bullet in him before he pulled the trigger. Xander and Takis should have done better."

"It's not their fault. I was egging him on."

She rested her hand on my shoulder. "You should tell her that."

Tears bubbled up to the surface. Not so much sadness as bone-deep frustration. I was a rat running in circles, hunting for cheese. And cheese was really awesome.

"My life is a disaster zone. The whole thing should be condemned."

"It's not so bad," Aunt Rita said. "You have us—your family."

Laughter bubbled out of me.

"I know," she said. "The Family is part of the reason my own life is ... let us go with *complicated*."

"Complicated is a good word for it."

"But I believe there is a reason for all of this. A plan."

I squinted at her. "Is this one of those conversation about God?"

"No—gods. A life this fucked up? Even God cannot do that. This level of fuckery is the work of those bastards on Mount Olympus. Between us, I am starting to wonder if maybe Zeus slipped Baboulas the salami." She winked. "That is a joke, but not too much of one. But there is a plan. You were meant to come to us, to know your family. And whatever the plan or the reason, I am glad you are here."

Things got girly after that. We hugged, cheek-kissed, and complimented each other's perfume. Then I waited until she teetered away on her man-killer heels, and I plopped my backside in one of the outside chairs, closed my eyes, and let the night swirl around me.

Lopez was out of reach, potentially forever.

Penka, Donk, and Eugene Bishop were captive, while this Winkler waited for ... what? Dad was still missing, and somehow he was tangled up with the Shitz-U operation.

I pulled out my phone. It only took a few minutes of tapping to discover that Winkler Enterprises was the same entity behind Shitz-U. Boy, the dough man running the joint must have thought I was seven kinds of stupid. And he was right. I should have done the digging then and there and unearthed the Winkler connection. I logged into the Crooked Noses Message Board, ran a search for Winkler Enterprises. The envelope at the top of the screen was red. I had a message sitting there from BangBang, a Crooked Nose who, I suspected, was onto me, thanks to my interest in the Makris Family and a slip of the fingers about being American. I'd been avoiding him (or her) since then, so the envelope stayed red.

Denial isn't just a river in Egypt—it's a messy thing, spilling all over the place.

Anyway, the Crooked Noses came through for me again, without realizing it. Winkler Enterprises had grubby fingers and toes in a lot of pies, worldwide. But Greece was a problem Winkler hadn't been able to solve ... yet. Every time he tried to tiptoe into Greece's crime market he wound up with a slapped hand and a bruised ego. And Winkler's right-hand man?

One Kostas Makris. Katerina Makri's son. Katerina Makris' uncle.

As neither Shakespeare nor Sir Walter Scott said: Oh what a tangled web we weave when we're butt-licking, family-betraying scum.

The puzzle pieces were in front of me, but the pictures didn't line up.

Fourteen Christmases ago, Santa Claus dropped a jigsaw puzzle down our chimney. The pieces were double-sided. The edges were ragged. No smooth frame. Little Tomas could have had the teddy bears on the box put together in minutes, but I'd lacked the

superpowers and the serenity to figure it out. This was the grown-up version of that puzzle, but unlike Santa's gift I couldn't dump this one on Goodwill. I had to keep working the pieces until the picture emerged. Dad was this puzzle's teddy bears. Complete the picture; locate Dad.

Then he and I were going to have words about why he lied to me—and probably Mom—for years about his job. If he wasn't a truck driver, what was he? Who was he when he wasn't actively being my dad?

I laid my phone on the table. I wasn't ready to go inside and face Grandma yet, not if she was amped up about my close call. Last thing I wanted was another lecture about what I could and couldn't do. My plan was to sit here and wait until I couldn't avoid going inside. The outhouse was conveniently located several feet away, so I procrastinate for a while.

My phone jittered on the iron tabletop. I flicked on the screen. My eyes bugged. Incoming text from Donk.

—*Yo, baby, I need a ride.*

Charming child

—*Where are you?* I texted back.

—*Church. Help.*

—*I'm coming. Which one?*

Nothing.

Saint Catherine's. It had to be, otherwise he'd be more specific, right?

I glanced over at Grandma's kitchen door. It was closed. Xander and Takis were on the other side. Every so often I could hear Takis murmur, followed by the rise of Grandma's voice as she verbally stripped off a pound—or half a kilo—of flesh. Papou threw in his euro worth periodically.

—*On my way.*

I fired off the message and pocketed my phone.

There was no way I could dodge the questions at the garage and the front gate, so I skulked along the compound wall until I found a place I knew I could climb. For sure an electronic eye was observing me, but Grandma was aboveground in her kitchen, along with Papou. Aunt Rita had gone back to her apartment to do whatever she did when the night was stretched out ahead of her. As close as Makria was (slightly ironic considering *makria* meant far, far away) I could reach the village before anyone realized I was missing. But maybe they'd make it in time to be my rescue team.

I wasn't stupid. The text had been typed in English, not Greek. Donk's English was rudimentary at best. He couldn't even spell his favorite curse word correctly. This was a setup and I knew it. But I

wanted answers. Some of them would be in that church.

Okay, probably I'd find those answers snuggled up to more questions, but it was a loose thread I could yank.

A tour bus was pulling out of the parking lot. Its passengers were on their feet, dancing. *When in Greece, do as the Greeks do* sounded like better advice than the Roman equivalent. What the Romans did in the old days was puke up perfectly good food. Probably in those days Roman mothers couldn't bring up the starving children in Africa because news traveled at the speed of whatever ships didn't sink, so their pool of dinnertime threats was more geographically limited.

My palms were sweating. I wiped them on my black jeans and hoped that my body would be more cooperative once I got inside. The only thing to fear was fear itself ... and also crazy psychopaths. I wasn't in the pool yet but I was already in over my head.

Makria's denizens were scattered, some gravitating toward their homes, others reeled in by the allure of the village square. Fairy lights raced from tree to tree. Music rolled out of high-quality speakers. Things were cooking—things that wanted me to sit a while and eat them until my belt hit its unbuckling point. Every day in Greece wanted to be a Thanksgiving-level food celebration.

Shunning food and fun for church—that was new for me.

After a deep breath or ten, I tugged on the church door. It let out a low whine straight out of a horror flick, which really exacerbated my sweaty palms situation. The air was warm and dry but cooler than outdoors. The colored glass apostles made faces in the windows; they recognized a fool when they saw one. Over to the right, the candle stand was alive with flickering lights; Greeks prayed often and hard. I was standing in the narthex, directly in front of the Virgin Mary and her Son. Mary wore an expression of barely suppressed exasperation; there was a woman who could really use a babysitter and some 'me time'.

Eugene Bishop was waiting, and he wasn't alone. On the floor, backs to the altar, were Donk, Penka, and Father Harry. They were cuffed and gagged. They looked rattled. Bishop's edges were just as rough. His clothes were long past fresh and his do-rag was askew. He was holding a gun and it was pointed in my direction.

"Lock the door behind you," he said, "or I'll shoot. First you, then them."

“Boy,” I said, “and I thought Lopez was the crazy one.”

“Where’s Oscar? Where’s my money?”

My heart was going all kinds of crazy, splashing blood through my body. It was making things hard to hear. I tried a deep, slow breath and exhaled, but that yoga Zen crap didn’t work on armed men.

“The NIS took him.”

He squinted. “Who?”

“The Greek CIA.”

“Fuck. That stupid fat fuck.” He pulled off his do-rag, tucked it under his arm, and rubbed his bald scalp. He’d been wearing the same sloppy pants and loose shirt for days now. He smelled like stale laundry and old sweat. His face had more hair than his head. “It wasn’t supposed to go down this way. Where the fuck is my money? Now what the fuck am I supposed to do?”

Find a synonym for ‘fuck’ didn’t seem like sound advice. Under stress, my brain was simpler than an abacus.

“You could put down the gun and go home.” As far as suggestions went, I thought that was a pretty good one.

“Can’t go home. Not until I kill you or convert you.” He made a sour face. “I don’t get why you’re so special. Everyone wants a piece of you, one way or another.”

“I don’t get it either. Why are the others tied up?”

“They’ve got to stay like that for now. The boss said so.”

“Shitz or Winkler?”

He looked surprised. “You know about Schmitz and Winkler?”

“Sure,” I said, lying through my teeth.

“Schmitz isn’t important. Oscar always calls him Shitz, like his stupid business name.”

“I thought it was kind of clever, actually ...”

Behind me, the church door opened. A couple of tourists stuck their heads in.

“Can we ...?”

“No!” Bishop screeched. The door closed in a hurry. He redirected his anger at me. “I told you to lock the door!”

I glanced back. “No lock.”

“Why the fuck doesn’t it lock? What kind of door doesn’t lock? That’s the whole point of a door!”

Now that he was under pressure the whole homey act had fallen

away. I liked the old Bishop better—that one didn't point guns at me.

Behind him, Father Harry was trying to wave his hands.

"I think Father Harry knows," I said.

Bishop rolled his eyes and sighed like I was killing him. "Go over there and pull down his gag."

With wobbly knees, I stumbled over to the hostages. Father Harry's gag wasn't so much a gag as it was someone's tube sock. My hands were boneless and shaky as I struggled to work the sock gag loose. While I was doing that I quietly checked out the others. Penka looked like she wanted someone to bleed ... after she stuck a knife in their eye. Donk's vibe was two parts terrified, one part hopping mad. Like Penka, he'd probably cut someone, as soon as he finished doing time in the fetal position.

The sock popped free. It wasn't, I noticed, a clean sock. Poor Father Harry. I hoped at least it was his own foot funk.

"Finally, God has answered my prayers," Father Harry said. "Is Kyria Katerina here with guns?"

"Uh, no. No guns."

"Henchmen?"

"Um ..."

His face fell. "So, it is just you then?"

I cleverly changed the subject by translating Bishop's inquiry about the doors.

"The doors do not lock," Father Harry said. "Your grandmother wanted the church to be open to anyone anytime, if they were in need of spiritual salve. Also during World War II the Nazis used to burn Greeks alive in their churches, so she figured it would be for the best to forgo the locks."

I relayed the pertinent parts to Bishop, who rolled his eyes.

"Next person to walk through that doors wins a bullet," he said. "I can't have people just walking in here messing up my plans."

Ignorant as I was of guns, I didn't know what Bishop was carrying, how many rounds or bullets or whatever it had, or whether he was a good shot. Without that, I couldn't figure out our odds of survival.

"What's your plan?"

He gestured for me to stuff the sock back in the priest's mouth. *Sorry*, I mouthed to Father Harry, hoping he would do the Christian thing and forgive me—if we made it out of here alive.

"Make you see the light, one way or another." Bishop snorted at his own joke, which made one of us. "We left something in your house for you, Lopez and me. Did you get it? Winkler wanted to know if you'd go running to the police or call on your family to deal with the problem. Like a test of your character. Don't pretend you didn't find him—we put him there for you."

My throat tightened. "You're talking about the other cop," I said slowly. "The dead one."

"Yeah, that's right."

"Did you and Lopez kill one of your own?"

"Nah. We would never do that. He was already dead, killed by one of his informants. It was an opportunity, that's all, and we took advantage of it."

I shivered. What kind of people looked at a dead colleague as a business opportunity? That was hardcore cold.

"Why didn't you report the body?" he wanted to know. "We had a bet going, Lopez and me."

"You mean your deceased friend, your co-worker, your compadre?" Bishop twitched. "Because the police would have asked too many questions, like why was there a dead cop in my house."

"Lopez was sure you'd squeal."

A few weeks ago I would have. But things had changed—I had changed. But what was I changing into?

"Why was this Winkler creep testing me?"

"Dunno. Winkler's not big on sharing. The boss doesn't have to be. Maybe the idea was to see if you could be corrupted. That's what we do in vice: test people to see if they're shit or potential shit."

"I'm not shit," I said. "I'm a mostly decent person. And those three people you've got tied up are mostly decent, too. One is a priest—maybe, possibly, could be decent all the way through ... although you never really know about priests. One's a kid. The other one ... okay, she's a drug dealer, but only prescription drugs."

He nodded like he knew. "There are levels."

"You don't want to kill us, Bishop. You're a policeman. You're one of the good guys."

"Not much money in being one of the good guys. There's a lot of money to be made playing in the shade." The gun dipped a bit. Was he having second thoughts?

"Not real money," I muttered.

The gun leveled out again. "What's that supposed to mean? Where's my money?"

"The money Lopez dug up at Sesklo—the money he was supposed to share with you—it was fake. The Germans have been counterfeiting the euro."

"What?"

I wasn't sure that was true. Bitchface Hera and her men in black had also grabbed the cash, so maybe it was real, maybe it wasn't. We'd never know. But Bishop didn't know that.

"Fake. The only thing it would have bought you is hard time."

His hand shook. "Winkler wouldn't do that to us. We held up our

end of the bargain. I'm holding it up right now."

I shrugged. "Don't shoot me, I'm just the messenger."

Cavalier words from a woman who was *this* close to crapping her pants. Being on the wrong end of a gun was getting to be a habit, one I really wanted to kick. It wasn't good for my blood pressure or my life expectancy. Even now my brain stem, heart, and legs were conspiring. They wanted to make a run for it. They were too dumb to realize there was nowhere to go—and there was nowhere I *would* go, not when there were three hostages. I had to keep him talking; if he was talking he wasn't shooting.

"Winkler wouldn't do that," Bishop said again.

"Why not? Doesn't sound to me like he's one of the good guys."

Doubt was creeping in. "What am I gonna do? I need that money."

"You can go home," I told him. "Put down the gun and walk away. Get on a plane and ..." I arced my hand through the air like a plane "...goodbye, pooppy old Greece, hello PDX."

He shook his head. "Winkler will know."

"It's not too late. Maybe my family can get you out of here without Winkler knowing."

"Winkler knows everything."

"What's Winkler's connection to my father?"

"I don't know. Man, we didn't know what to do when you drove on out to that place and figured out your old man's workplace didn't exist. Then when you went in and talked to that fat piece of Schmitz ..."

"Do you know my father?"

"Never met him."

"Is he really a truck driver?"

"I don't know. What do I look like ... Google? I don't know shit. I do my job, collect my easy money, profit."

"Easy fake money."

Bishop made a face.

"Did you guys put the bomb under my car?"

Hands in the air, gun wagging at a precarious position: "Yo, it was a fake. Wasn't even a good fake. We just wanted to rattle your cage, maybe consider that your precious family can't protect your ass from everything. Not the way Winkler can. What do you say—join or die?"

A sound of disgust made it out of my mouth. "I can't believe you said that. You sound like bad dialogue in a B movie."

"Uwe Boll bad or Tarantino bad?"

I raised an eyebrow. "Tarantino is the king of great dialogue."

"Just testing you," he said. "So join or die? You're lucky you got choices. Most people don't get choices."

"I'm not joining any club where I don't get to meet the president

first.”

“Look at their faces.” He wagged the gun at Penka, Donk, and Father Harry. “Don’t you want to save them?”

“What happens if I join your little bratwurst club?”

“Then I let them go.”

“That easy?” I wasn’t buying it.

“Sure. Why not?”

“Did this Winkler give you that kind of power? Remember, this is somebody who tried to buy you off with fake money, knowing the moment you tried to exchange it back home you’d be in deep doo-doo. You think Winkler’s going to let you control a life or death situation? He doesn’t have that kind of faith in you. You’re ... ” I was in a church, which seemed like it would be the perfect place to pray for the right words. Too bad God and I didn’t make eye contact when we passed each other in the hallway. He’d turned His back on me when I begged and pleaded to keep my mother, and He’d done nothing since to make it up to me, like bring her back from the dead. “... disposable. Like, a tissue or a condom.”

He stared at me for entirely too long. Then he wagged the gun at me. “I made a decision just now while you were insulting me. I’m gonna shoot them, then I’m gonna use you to collect myself some sweet, real ransom money. I bet that old witch would lay some serious dough on me to keep you safe.”

There was sound on the other side of the stained glass windows, a bending of a twig, almost to breaking point but not quite. The apostles made pretty windows but they sucked at soundproofing. We all turned our heads, held our collective breaths for a moment. I really wanted it to be Family or the police.

Silence.

Bishop turned back around, gun in the business position. “So, I’m gonna gag you and tie you up on account of how you talk too much. This way you won’t get any dumb ideas about lunging at me when I shoot one of the others.” He tapped the side of his head. “I’m a thinker. Winkler should keep me around. Now stand still and don’t do anything stupid.”

“You ever shot anyone before, Bishop?”

“Sure, lots of times. Normally they’re running and shooting back. I’ve never shot anyone standing still ...” He glanced up at the painted ceiling, the stained glass windows, the religious icons that were inescapable in a Greek church. “... or in a church where God was watching over my shoulder the whole time. Say, you think I’m gonna go to hell for this?”

“Not if you’re Greek Orthodox. They don’t do hell as a fire-and-brimstone destination afterlife.”

"I'm Southern Baptist."

"Oh yeah, you're going to burn."

"Shit," he said. "We should do this outside."

"God is like Santa Claus: He's always watching."

"Aw, man." He stomped his foot on the marble floor. "Why'd you have to go and bring Santa into this? We were good until that part."

"Good? You were going to tie me up!"

"Changed my mind. I'm gonna shoot you for the Santa crack." To prove his point he fired.

I flung myself on the floor. A bullet went whizzing over my head, buried itself in the door. Someone had Christmas issues.

"Jesus!" Bishop cried out. "Can't you stand still?"

There was a noise at the window, a faint, high squeal. Someone was trying to open the window. Bishop whirled around, fired three more shots at the colored glass. One of the apostles shattered. Muffled outrage emanated from ground level as Father Harry tipped forward. He scooted toward Bishop like a very fat, no-longer-hungry caterpillar.

Behind me there was a soft scrape as the door opened and a pair of hands reached out and grabbed me.

I yelped.

Bishop fired at the door. The hands let me go. I used the opportunity to scramble toward the sand-filled candle stand, where worshipers lit their candles for people who were dead or otherwise absent. On the table next to it sat a wooden box with a slit for donations of the cash kind, although I supposed they took checks, too, even if there was a good chance they'd bounce higher than a tennis ball. Bishop whipped around to where Father Harry was crawling toward the shards of his beloved windows. He raised his gun again.

I seized the collection box, swung it upwards, catching Bishop's hand. The gun soared across the church. It hit the floor with a dull, metallic *thunk*.

"You broke my hand!" Bishop cried. "Bitch!"

There wasn't time to play nurse. I pitched the box at his head, bolted to the back of the church, and began the hunt for Bishop's gun.

The gun was in Donk's hand.

Chapter 19

THE CHURCH DOORS OPENED, and Marika rolled through.

“*Vlakas!*” She backhanded Bishop. “You ripped my one and only bodyguard shirt when you shot the door. Now I have to buy another one.” She peered past him to where I was unpicking Donk’s fingers from around the gun’s grip. “Katerina, translate for this idiot. I want him to know he is stupid.”

“Did he shoot you?” I called out.

“No, I caught it on the door handle. Tell him he’s stupid and I will make him pay.”

“Not now, Marika,” I said. “We’ve got a situation here.” Donk finally let go. Eek! What was I supposed to do with the thing? I held it two-fingered, like a banana peel.

“I know. That is why I came. Next time, do not leave without your bodyguard, eh?”

“How did you know where I was?”

“The church is bugged. I was maybe eavesdropping when Takis got the call that you had left.”

I’d forgotten Saint Catherine’s had a little intrusive secret.

Bishop rallied. With one hand down, all he had left to fight with was a lone fist. He swung it at Marika. A second window shattered. This time the bullet was incoming. It buried itself in Bishop’s good arm. Blood squirted out of him like he was a bottle of ketchup. There was a primal roar as Takis came barreling through the church doors, weapon raised.

“Hit my wife again, the next one will be in your throat,” he said in English.

Bishop flopped down on the ground, cross-legged, cradling his arm. “Greece sucks,” he cried.

“Pretty sure Greece hates you right back,” I told him.

Behind Takis, Xander, Stavros, Elias, and a dozen other cousins swept in. They got to work helping the hostages. Xander relieved me of Bishop’s gun, shoved it down the back of his cargo pants. He looked me over to make sure I was in one unbroken piece. My shell was fine; it was the interior that was shattered.

“I’m okay,” I said. My chattering teeth said otherwise.

His eyebrows rose in disbelief. The man’s bullshit meter was good. He rubbed my arm, and then moved on. I stood there dazed, for a moment.

Penka was, unsurprisingly, furious. She made threats against Bishop's manhood in two languages—three if I counted the creative sign language. Donk, he just shook.

I moved over to his side, slung my arm around his shoulder.

"Are you hitting on me?" he wanted to know.

"No."

"Because I can feel your breast pushing—"

Marika reached out, slapped the back of his head on my behalf.

When Melas stepped into the church it was with a half dozen other cops on his tail. He scanned the holy space until his gaze landed on me. He closed the distance between us in an instant.

"You're not faking it anymore?" I asked him.

"Harder to do my job if I'm not doing my job," he said with a tight, grim smile. "You okay?"

Good question. I nodded because at least I was alive. "At least Portland's not-even-close-to-finest won't be stalking me anymore, so that's something. Any word on the missing German?"

"Nothing yet. Eventually he'll surface."

"Or he'll vanish forever." Because that was the world I was standing in now, one where the players had the power to clap their hands and go, *Ala peanut butter sandwiches*, and wipe people off the board permanently.

Melas's gaze traveled over me—up, down, back up again. Not a sexual thing this time, he was checking to make sure my pieces were intact. It was nice that he cared. "I'd vanish if I were him, too. Something tells me none of this played out the way it was supposed to, which means someone needs to take the fall."

I nodded over to where Pappas and a constable were helping Detective Eugene Bishop into a pair of cuffs. "Isn't he the scapegoat?"

"I guess we'll find out. But I think he and his friend were just glorified messenger boys. Disposable. Use them and they're done."

There was a sudden commotion outside. Raised voices. Then in walked Hera and her cheerless band of black-clad goons. She took in the scene, then smiled like she was the only shopper at a ninety-percent-off sale at Whores R Us.

Hips swaying, she sauntered over to where we were standing while her men took custody of Bishop.

"Hey," I said. "You can't take him!"

"Wow, you keep the gifts coming, don't you? I like having you here, Katerina. You make my job easy. Follow you around, swoop in and pick up whatever treasure you uncover ... I love it." She winked at Melas, then swished out, putting extra swing in her tail feathers.

"Skank," I said in English. Melas looked to me for an explanation, so I told him.

"She's not that bad."

"I have a feeling she's worse."

He shook his head. "Women."

"Ugh, this isn't about you. She's walked away with two people who could potentially help me find my father."

"I do understand."

"I doubt that," I told him. "You know where your parents are."

He opened his mouth to speak but I walked away, trying not to shake.

We all gave our statements. Donk had been whisked away by Lopez and Bishop while he was waiting in my car. They'd appealed to his inner and outer teenage boy by asking for directions to a strip club, then played dumb tourists who no-understandee. Overeager Donk had offered to show them the way. With Penka they had played the police card and put her under false arrest in a country where they had no jurisdiction. Father Harry had hurried to the church this evening, believing someone in the Family needed spiritual guidance. He was more a victim of circumstance than calculated abduction. Bishop had never been missing. He'd been playing babysitter, while Lopez slunk around in my shadow.

Eventually, Melas and I gravitated toward each other again.

"Why would this Winkler think you would side with the Germans?" Melas asked me.

"I don't know."

"You sure the name doesn't mean anything to you?"

The thing about betrayal is that it comes in different sizes. You've got your big betrayals, your middle-sized betrayals, and the tiny snippets, like the one I this close to throwing down. But who would I really be betraying? Dad had betrayed me with his lies, but I suspected he had intended for them to be the white variety, to keep me safe. To drag him back to safety I needed to tell the whole, white truth. Well maybe not the whole truth—just the pertinent parts. So I told Melas about Dad's workplace that didn't exist and Schmitz squatting on the land with his army of portable toilets.

He stood there a moment with a jaw of stone, processing.

"Your father works for a company that doesn't exist. Did you check his tax records? His paycheck has to be coming from somewhere."

I shook my head. "Probably a shell corporation, if my thousands of hours of TV-watching is correct."

His smile was wry. "You miss it?"

"Watching TV and being in a comfortable relationship with the couch? Who wouldn't? Here people shoot at me." Tears crowded into my eyes. I looked away so he wouldn't notice I was on the edge. "That's when they're not trying to turn me to the dark side. I'm Luke

Skywalker, and everyone around me is Darth Vader or Jar Jar Binks.”

“Just so we’re clear, which of those am I?”

“I haven’t decided yet.”

He nodded to Marika, who was fingering the hole in her shirt, scowling. “Just between us, she’s C3PO.”

The smile was in there somewhere, but I couldn’t quite make it happen.

“You should go get some rest,” he said. “We’ve lost the two Americans but we’ve still got a man on the run out there.” He nodded to someone behind me, and then Xander was at my side. “Take her home.” Xander placed his hand on my lower back, steered me out of the church.

The streets in Makria were narrow and cobbled, completely unsuitable for cars. But Xander had brought his motorcycle. He lifted me onto the back, buckled his helmet on my head, then took his place up front. It felt good to have someone to hold, even if it was under the guise of motorcycle safety. I curled my arms around his waist, closed my eyes, rested my head on his back.

A moment later, he lifted me off the motorcycle and carried me home to Grandma’s house.

It was late, but at this time Grandma was usually still up. Tonight the kitchen was empty and her bed was unmade.

“Where’s Grandma?” I asked him.

He shrugged and held up a finger, which I interpreted as, Wait here, I’ll go check out the secret hidey-holes.

My body was tired all the way through to my bones. Now that it was no longer required to fight or run, all it wanted to do was sleep. Tomorrow I’d let my mind process; tonight it wasn’t fit for anything except a long reboot and some wacko dreams. I scoffed a pastry parcel stuffed with feta, onions, and spinach, brushed my teeth, then opened my bedroom door. The shutters were open, and the third German was sitting on my bed, gun resting on his lap. Inches away, gnawing on a luggage tag, stood my goat. He was oblivious to the gunman.

The German lifted a finger to his lips. “Scream and I will shoot the goat,” he said.

“Shoot the goat and I’ll scream.”

“Then I will shoot you, too.”

He had me there. “I’ll be quiet.”

“Good.”

“Where’s my grandmother?”

He smiled, the psycho. “In the hospital.”

My heart and stomach lurched. “Is she okay?”

“Do I look like a doctor? I don’t care about the old woman. She is on the way out, and soon. They say you are the future of this family.”

He glanced around the room. “*Gott*, this place is a ... *scheißhaus* ... a shit house.”

“Family heirloom. What do you want?”

“To change the future.”

“You’re going kill me.”

He shrugged, made a face. “If that is what it takes—yes.”

There was something about him, something familiar, like a snippet of a song, a whiff of cologne. I’d seen pieces of his face on someone else, before those pieces splattered on a wall.

“The woman with the bomb, you’re related to her aren’t you?”

Where there was darkness there was me, swinging a metaphorical stick at what I hoped was a piñata and not my own dense skull.

“Winkler’s children,” he said. “Loyal. Winkler sent three of us here to begin a new business partnership. But you Greeks are proving to be ... difficult.”

“Greece has had a lot of experience with invading forces.”

“Winkler would prefer a profitable partnership, and to extend that opportunity to you, as the future leader of the Makris Family.”

Where was Xander?

“Grandma’s not dead yet, and I don’t want the job. I’m going blue in the face telling people.”

“You think you have a choice.” He chuckled. “That is ... how do you say ... cute.”

“I’m still an American citizen, and I’m here for one reason, to find my father. As soon as I find him we’re going home. I’m going to find a new job, get my own place, and watch a lot of Netflix. I’ve missed a lot while I’ve been here! I have no plans or desire to take over the family business!”

His lips curled back, revealing a row of sharklike teeth that made me itch for an air tank and a gun.

“Winkler can give you choices. Without Winkler, you only have one: bow down to the old woman’s plan. Winkler is freedom. You can’t trust somebody who is out of options; they’ll hunt for more, even if it kills them. Winkler gives you options up front so you can choose.”

“Provided I do what Winkler wants me to do, right? Which makes him Grandma, without the excellent cooking skills. What is it exactly he wants from me?”

“Loyalty. Cooperation. Freedom to do business in Greece, for a modest share of profit.”

“Translation: Distribute drugs and fake-o money.”

“Among other things. How did you find out about the money?”

He was high if he thought I would give up the butcher’s name. I pulled a story out of a tight, dark place. “I’m a savant,” I said. “I can spot inconsistencies in paper a mile away.”

His forehead scrunched up like wax paper. "How far is a mile?"

"Um ... I can't do basic math when I'm freaking out."

He opened his mouth. There was a soft pop. His eyes widened, then blood squirted out the side of his head and he slumped sideways.

Relief and horror poured through me.

I ran to the window and looked out. There was nobody around that I could see, no sound but the annual song of the cicada and the soft bubbling of the fountains.

"Too soon?" a voice called out from a nearby rooftop. It was my cousin (second or third) the sniper.

"Too soon!"

He cursed variety of saints and their long-dead mothers, then yelled, "I'm working on my timing."

I gave him two thumbs up. One of these days he'd get it—I had faith in him.

The bedroom door burst open, courtesy of Xander's foot. He was holding a gun and it was aimed at the air above the dead German.

"Too late," I said, voice wobbling. I crouched down and threw my arms around my goat. "He overdosed on Pop Rocks. I did warn him."

Xander holstered the gun. Probably he wanted to ask if I was okay but he couldn't. Instead, he inspected me so closely I began to feel like fruit.

"I'm okay," I said. "But you should see the other guy." The words were meant to be light but they came out cracked. Xander took my hand, led me into the kitchen, which was a corpse-free zone. "Is Grandma okay?" I said. He looked at me, curious. "Winkler Junior said she was in the hospital."

Chin tilt.

More relief washed over me. Wherever Grandma was it wasn't the hospital.

"Where is she? Did you find her?"

He nodded to the door, indicated for me to follow. As we were going out, family was flooding in.

"Don't touch the body," I said to them. "Message Detective Melas."

Xander stopped, looked down at me, his eyes black in the courtyard's low light. I couldn't read him but I stabbed around in the dark, hoping I'd strike.

"I'm sure you all usually keep this kind of thing—murder—in-house. Normally maybe you'd bury him an unmarked grave or a new speed bump—does Greece even have speed bumps? Never mind. This is one of the guys who tried to kill Melas. Think of it as an act of goodwill bringing him in on this."

But the truth was, despite not calling the police back home when there was a dead man in my house, I wanted to do the right thing.

Grandma might not call the police, but I wasn't Grandma. And I never would be. It was time everyone got used to that.

Melas was already pulling up to the front gates by the time we reached the guardhouse. He can't have been too far away. The guard waved him through. He parked by the arch and swaggered over to where we were standing. His swagger was tired though, his shoulders drooping. I wondered when he'd last slept, last ate a proper meal at a table that wasn't his steering wheel. He was back in his police car now. Somewhere along the way the family must have reclaimed the vehicle he'd 'borrowed' from me. Around here, things moved like clockwork. The Makris Family was the Disney World of crime.

He nodded to me on the way past. It was a curt move, but his eyes stayed on me until his neck reached its snapping point.

Grandma was sitting on the fountain's stone rim, watching the gates open and close. I sat down beside her.

"Watch," she told me before I could say a word about the German. "We are about to have company."

"What kind of company?"

"You will see." She reached for my hand, pulled it onto her lap, encased in hers. Her skin felt the way I imagined a dragon's skin felt: leathery, warm, dry.

Sure enough, it wasn't long before I heard the familiar snap, crackle, pop of rubber striking the dirt road. The vehicle was coming on fast—too fast. A white van pulled out of night, into the compound's pool of light, dragging a dust storm behind it.

Hera and company. She was shaping up to be the human equivalent of a colonoscopy.

This time she was riding up front with the driver. She jumped out, her body a walking advertisement for this season's government spy collection.

Grandma nodded in the direction of the guardhouse. The gates began to part.

Hera approached, big smile stretched across her face. "We have to stop meeting like this," she told me. "I hate you but keep the gifts coming, and I adore gifts that save me time."

Grandma looked her up and down. "What are you meant to be?"

"I'm NIS."

"Then why are you dressed like a clown? You girls today, you draw a face on top of your face. Who can tell what you look like?"

Hera stared at her, openmouthed.

"Close that mouth before insects make a new home in it."

Her mouth snapped shut. It took her a moment, but she made a full, snarky recovery. "I'm here for the German. He's ours."

Grandma looked at me. "Do we have a German?"

"In a way," I said.

"In what way?"

"It's complicated," I told her. "The NIS won't get anything out of him."

Hera's entire countenance was the definition of smug. "We can make anyone talk."

"Then yeah ..." I shrugged "... I guess we have a German."

"Take them," Grandma said, calling over one of the cousins. Hera and her merry band of undertakers strode through the arch. Boy, were they about to be surprised.

"I sure hope they have a necromancer on staff," I said to Grandma.

"If anyone has a necromancer it is the NIS. He is dead then?"

I nodded. I couldn't bring myself to joke about his brains and their sloppy exit strategy. "He was Winkler's son. All three Germans were Winkler's kids."

"Winkler." She shook her head. "Winkler is becoming a big problem. Winkler tried to come in the front door but we said no. Then the back door ... we said no, even though Greeks have a history of enjoying that sort of thing. Now Winkler is trying to make a trapdoor, like one of those spiders."

"What does Winkler want?"

"What does anyone want? Everything."

"I don't want everything. Just a few things would be nice."

A big sigh seeped out of her. "That is how it always starts, with a few little things. Then one day you wake up and you are overseeing construction of the Death Star."

I felt my mouth fall into the slack position.

Footsteps erupted on the stones behind us. Melas came storming out of the courtyard, with a face like Florida during hurricane season. "I called off the paramedics," he told me, clipping the phone back on his belt. "If she keeps this up we'll be out of jobs."

No prizes for guessing who *she* was. "I'm pretty sure we could have her killed." I looked at Grandma.

"No," Grandma said. "No killing law enforcement ... unless it is absolutely necessary."

"It went badly then?" I asked Melas.

More footsteps. Hera's laugh was like a handful of glass pitched at a fan. "I just want to talk."

"So talk," I told her.

Her lips puckered. "Not to you—at least not yet. Nikos, we have a lot to discuss."

To his credit, he didn't look at her. His gaze stayed stuck to my face. "Got to get back to the station," he said. "Got a long night ahead of us." He nodded to Grandma, and then strode back to his cop car,

leaving me along with Grandma and Hera.

“Did you find your German?” I asked her.

“Wow,” she said, “you’re rough on men.”

“Only when they’re trying to kill me or induct me into a cult.”

Hera flashed her Miss Greece smile. “Dead or not, he’s still useful for our purposes.”

“Oh boy,” I said. “Are you going to bathe in his blood? You’re such a freak.”

The smile dimmed. “If that’s what it takes,” she said cryptically. “We have questions for you, of course. You’ll need to come with us.”

Grandma’s eyebrows jumped into the oh-no-you-didn’t position, high on her forehead. “Katerina is not going anywhere. You want to talk, talk here, with our lawyers present.”

“We are above the law,” Hera said.

Grandma was tiny, but when she was channeling her inner Don Corleone she was dough, expanding to twice her original size. Suddenly there didn’t seem to be enough room on the planet for her and Hera. I scooted sideways so I wouldn’t get squished.

“You are above nothing. Like your namesake you are petty and vindictive. Take your dead German and your American policemen and go tell your bosses what a good girl you are. The grownups have to talk now.”

Hera refocused on me. “Nikos has goals, you know. He wants to take down the Makris Family. So if you think he’s hanging around you for any other reason, you’re wrong.”

I opened my mouth to deliver what I hoped was an eye-bruising blow, when I was interrupted by a new crunching on the long, dark road through the trees, and the hum of a vehicle in excellent health moving our way. The giant spotlight on the compound’s roof switched on again, flooding the driveway with cool, white light, but the vehicle stopped before the light could reach it. It sat idling, concealed by the trees, as though figuring out what the heck to do next.

“Get out there,” Grandma barked. Takis, Stavros, and couple of others jogged through the gates and vanished into the trees, avoiding the road.

The rest of us waited.

There was low clunk out of my line of sight, followed by a *swoosh!* The NIS van exploded. The hood shot up into the air, spun a few times like a drunk ballerina, and landed on what was left of the van’s roof. The cicada’s mating calls were drowned out by the fire’s hissing and popping. What had started out as a fragrant late-summer night now smelled like a deadly accident at a rubber factory. We all looked at the flaming van. It was pretty, until you considered that someone had fired a freakin’ missile at the thing.

An engine roared. Tires squealed as the hidden vehicle shot backwards, rocketing toward the main road. Whoever they were they were gone, and Grandma didn't look committed to chasing them.

Something occurred to me. "Were ... Lopez and Bishop still in the van?"

"Yes," Hera said, her pretty face all marked up with a frown.

I winced. My stomach was rolling.

"*Gamo tis mana's sou mouni*," Hera swore. "How am I supposed to find Winkler now?"

I hoped that first part wasn't aimed at me. Mind you, you just never know about people. Maybe she really was a lesbian necrophiliac who wanted to scissor with my dead mother.

"Winkler. Ha!" Grandma said. "Winkler is smoke, a name, a phantom. You can't find Winkler because Winkler is nobody.

"Who is he then?"

"Who knows? Not me. I am just an old woman who enjoys gardening and baking."

Hera went into petulant child mode, hands on hips. "You know, and you have to tell me."

"Who says?"

"The law."

"I am flattered that you think I know so much, but you are naive and also too skinny. You should probably eat something." She glanced around. "Somebody go to my kitchen, bring this one some food before she faints."

Takis, Stavros, and the others jogged back. Cousins passed them midstream, dragging hoses from outside the garage to the burning van. The gate guard was wrestling the fire extinguisher off the wall.

"Didn't see him," Takis said. His companions had the same amount of nothing to tell. His head was turned towards Grandma, but his gaze flicked sideways to Hera then back to Grandma. "Couldn't see the make of the vehicle either."

"Really?" Hera said dryly.

"It was dark," Takis said.

"It is dark," Grandma said. "It is no surprise you could not see."

"Probably they were just hunters and they took a wrong turn," I said.

Hera looked at me, repulsion on her pretty face. The feeling was mutual. "Who takes a missile launcher hunting?"

Takis shrugged. "I do—doesn't everyone?"

"American hunters always do," I said.

"See?" Takis said. "Nothing strange to see here."

Hera made a disgusted noise and stomped off—prettily, damn her. I bet she was one of those women who glowed when she wept. Not

like me. I had a natural gift for the ugly cry. She planted herself near the fire, pulled out her phone and stuck a finger in one ear while her mouth moved a mile a minute.

With Hera out of the way, Grandma turned her attention to Takis. "Well?"

"Opel Astra Dream. Silver."

"Whose?"

Takis shrugged. "Could be a rental."

"Somebody is watching the watchers," Grandma said.

"If it was me, I would say look for somebody who likes fire." He looked at me. "Know anybody like that?"

Yeah, I did. We all did.

"You knew someone was coming," I said to Grandma.

"Yes."

"How?"

"Instinct. The NIS took two people who were not theirs to take, and then they came for a third, for one of Winkler's children. Winkler is not the kind to sit back under those circumstances. I respect that and understand. Business is business, but law enforcement is not business."

"Won't Winkler come for us now? Two of his children died here on Makris property."

"No. They died doing Winkler's bidding."

"And the third ..."

Melas. That's why he'd been in hiding. He'd killed one of Winkler's children and knew Winkler would come for him. Grandma had just said law enforcement was not business to Winkler.

"Nikos, yes. That is why I had him hiding in the dungeon, so he would be safe from Winkler's revenge."

"But now Winkler has to know he's not in critical condition."

She held up a hand, low enough that it couldn't be considered an insult. "Melas is safe from Winkler." The hand shook as she lowered it.

I felt like I'd swallowed a mouthful of chunky milk. "Grandma, what did you do?"

"Nothing. Okay, maybe we made a deal."

"But three of Winkler's children are dead."

"I told you: business is business. Nikos Melas is safe, even though he is police."

When she wanted to be—or maybe when she needed to be—Grandma could be colder than a polar bear's privates.

"I understand the words coming out of your mouth," I said, "but the concept is flying way over my head. See? Whoosh! Are you saying if Dad's kidnappers offer you a decent enough deal you'll ... let it go?"

"That is very different."

My eyebrows rose. The gesture was probably wasted, what with all the dim lighting and all. "What was the deal?"

"Eh, what does it matter now? The boy is dead."

"Grandma ..."

"What?"

"Who was I supposed to meet the other night?"

"Maybe Winkler's son."

"You tried to marry me off to Winkler's son? Are you crazy? That was the deal, wasn't it? I marry Winkler's kid and Melas gets to live."

"Sometimes we have to do terrible things to ensure the safety of those we care for."

She had me there. I did care about Melas. But marrying me off to a criminal? Not cool.

"He tried to kill me!"

"But he didn't."

"Yeah, because we killed him first! Enough," I told her. "No more setups. Especially not to known criminals and other people who want to kill me. The only person who gets to choose my future husband is me. Nod if you understand."

She blinked. "Get some rest. We will talk tomorrow."

I yawned. My deferred exhaustion was doubling back for me. "One more thing before I hit the hay—"

Grandma chuckled. "Your American expressions are amusing. Now I am picturing you punching a horse's food."

I couldn't help smiling. But it was a small one, I swear. "How did the third German get into the compound? I thought you tightened up security after the whole Baptist thing?"

"We were to have a meeting about your marriage. But I was called away on other business, and that is when he took a detour to the grave via your bedroom," she said sourly.

"What business?"

"The American government wanted to know why I let the NIS take two of their police officers into custody."

I didn't bother asking how they knew. Saint Catherine's was wired for sound. Only Grandma knew how many government agencies were listening in. The NIS was one of them, guaranteed. Greece was Oscar the Grouch's garbage can. Everything was rotten and messy and tangled.

"Lopez and Bishop were working for Winkler. Winkler was using them to pump me for information about Dad's whereabouts. Which means Winkler isn't involved in Dad's kidnapping."

Grandma's nod was slow. "Another name I can cross off the list."

"There's a list?"

"Longer than Santa's. And even I am not certain who is naughty

and who is nice.”

Chapter 20

THE CLEANUP CREW WAS GOOD—TOO good. All this death and no evidence that someone had been shot in my room. When it came down to it, I was the only evidence. The night was clobbering me like a sack of bricks. My hands shook as I worked the zipper on my jeans down. My teeth were clacking as stress loosened my joints. A man had died in here, and I had crisp new bedding and a new rug to show for it. Didn't seem right. Logically I knew he would have killed me, but that didn't mean I wanted him dead.

I crawled into bed, pulled the sheet up to my chin, reached for my phone. I checked the usual suspects: email, Facebook, email again. Then I figured I'd check out the Crooked Noses. The envelope in the top corner was still red, only this time the number of unread messages was two. Both were from BangBang. Heart in my throat, I clicked on the newest message.

A photograph began to slowly load. I really hoped it wasn't a dick pic.

It wasn't.

I was staring at the third man from Baby Dimitri's shop. He had a name. He had a job description.

Three chairs. Two men. An aquamarine sky. The sea was a shade between emerald and sapphire. When it wanted to be, Greece was a fine jewelry store.

Laki grinned. "Katerina Makris-with-an-S."

Without returning the grin I sat myself down between them in the vacant chair. "The NIS," I said.

Baby Dimitri stared straight ahead, arms folded. "Fucking NIS."

"I know your buddy works for them."

That day when the godfather had been all twitchy about the Germans, I assumed it was because the third man was one of them. But he wasn't. The third man was an NIS agent. Baby Dimitri's sudden silence had been an act of self-preservation.

"A person can be many things. Only boring people are one thing."

"How many things are you?"

He chuckled. "What do you want, Katerina?"

“Nothing. Just making conversation.” I watched the beach, envying the beach-goers their ignorance, their obliviousness to this land’s other personalities. “Somebody blew up an NIS van in Grandma’s driveway.”

He leaned forward, looked at Laki. “Did you hear that? Somebody blew up a van in the old woman’s driveway.”

Laki’s face broke out in a broad grin. “I heard.”

“A couple of American cops were killed,” I said.

“That’s too bad,” Baby Dimitri said. “The world has changed. Used to be people were safe in Greece.”

“Unless they were shit,” Laki said.

“Unless they were shit,” Baby Dimitri agreed.

“You blew up in the NIS van—why?”

“My nephew is a moron, but he is my blood. Nobody takes what is mine. Now I have made a new enemy, thanks to those American *malakes*.” He looked to me for ... I don’t know what. Confirmation, I think.

“Nobody saw anything,” I said. “Especially not the car.”

Baby Dimitri grunted. “There was nothing to see.”

“Which would be why we didn’t see it.”

“Maybe you are not so stupid.”

I looked down at my feet. The sandals were fine, but I was in the mood for footwear that made me feel like I was in love with Greece. Something I could wear as I wandered across the hot pebbles, bodyguards following at a discreet distance.

“Come to think of it,” I said, “I do want something ...”

Thank **you** for reading *Doing Crime*, the third of Kat Makris’ adventures! *In Crime* (Kat Makris #4) is available now! To be notified about new releases and deals, sign up for my mailing list: <http://eepurl.com/ZSeuL>. Or like my Facebook page at: <https://www.facebook.com/alexkingbooks>.

All my best,

Alex A. King

Also by Alex A. King

Disorganized Crime (Kat Makris #1) Trueish Crime (Kat Makris #2)

Doing Crime (Kat Makris #3)

In Crime (Kat Makris #4)

Outta Crime (Kat Makris #5)

Night Crime (Kat Makris #6)

Good Crime (Kat Makris #7)

White Crime (Kat Makris #8)

Seven Days of Friday (Women of Greece #1) One and Only Sunday (Women of Greece #2)

Freedom the Impossible (Women of Greece #3) Light is the Shadow (Women of Greece #4)

No Peace in Crazy (Women of Greece #5) Summer of the Red Hotel (Women of Greece #6)

Rotten Little Apple (Women of Greece #7)

Family Ghouls (Greek Ghouls #1) Royal Ghouls (Greek Ghouls #2)

Pride and All This Prejudice